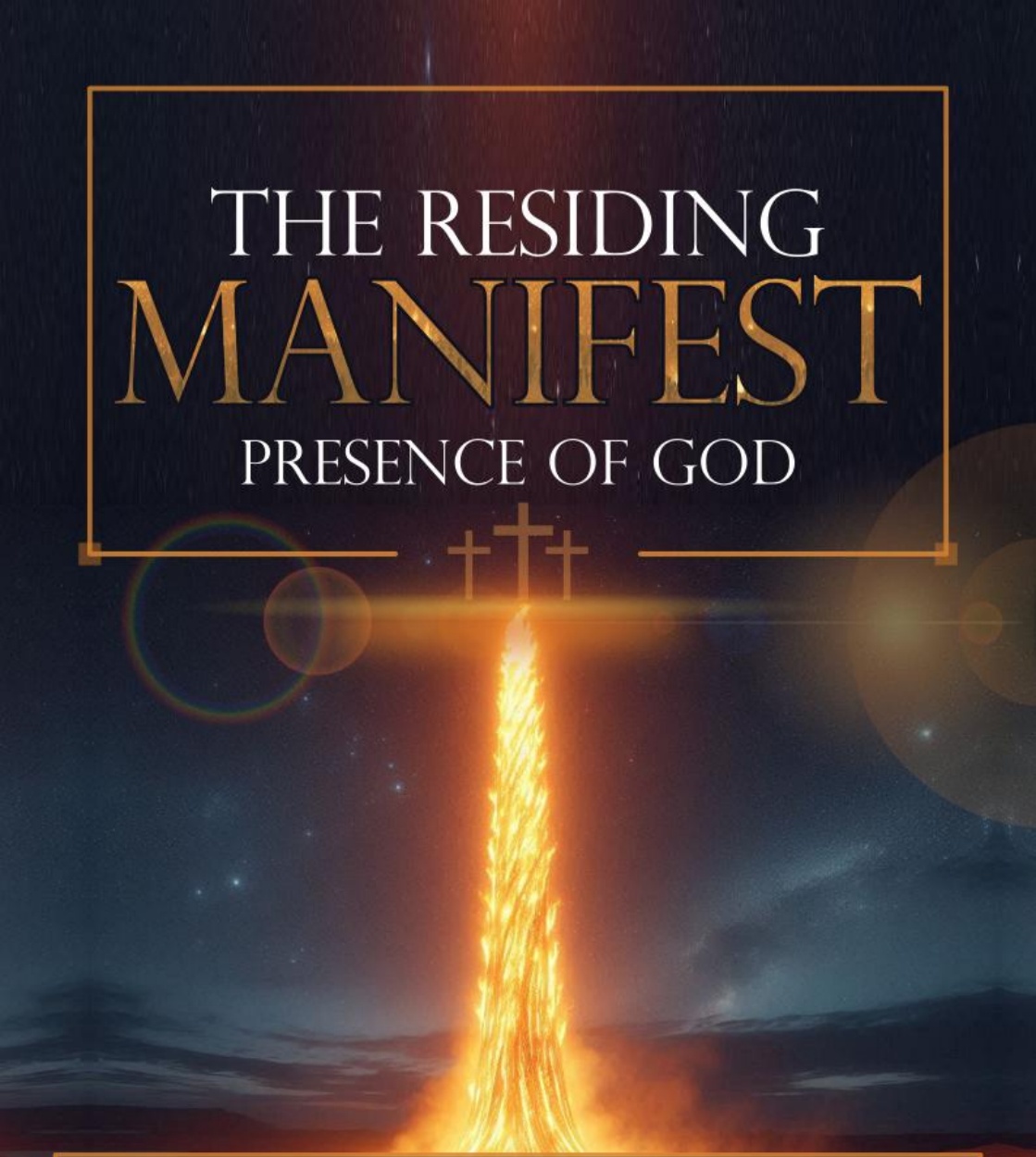
THE RESIDING MANIFEST PRESENCE OF GOD



"And the LORD went before them… by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."
(Exodus 13:21-22)

"… they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."
(Revelation 3:4)

MOSES AYOMKUN OLADIPUPO

INTRODUCTORY HYMN

"Away with our fears,
Our troubles and tears.
The Spirit is come,
The witness of Jesus
Returned to His home;

The pledge of our Lord
To His Heaven restored
Is sent from the sky,
And tells us our Head
Is exalted on high.

Our Advocate there
By His blood and His prayer
The gift hath obtained,
For us He hath prayed,
And the Comforter gained;

Our glorified Head
His Spirit hath shed
With His people to stay
And never again
Will He take Him away.

Our heavenly Guide
With us shall abide,
His comforts impart,
And set up His kingdom
Of love in the heart.

The heart that believes
His kingdom receives
His power and His peace,
His life, and His joy's
Everlasting increase.

The presence divine
Doth inwardly shine,
The Shechinah shall rest
On all our assemblies,
And glow in our breast;

By day, and by night
The pillar of light
Our steps shall attend,
And convoy us safe
To our prosperous end.

Then let us rejoice
In heart and in voice
Our Leader pursue,
And shout as we travel
The wilderness through;

With the Spirit remove
To Zion above,
Triumphant arise,
And walk with our God,
Till we fly to the skies."

---Charles Wesley (1707–1788)---

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THE RESIDING MANIFEST PRESENCE OF GOD

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Scripture quotations are taken from the
HOLY BIBLE, KING JAMES BIBLE

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SECTION 1

PREAMBLES

INTRODUCTION

To the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I gladly present my book, "THE RESIDING MANIFEST PRESENCE OF GOD." This book is the major break away book from my previously published book "The Light And The Shining Light." In that book, I had explained that I had some portions of it broken off to form some new books saying, "It took a great while writing this book as I had intended to write just a little book, but I thought it better to merge a few other books I had started writing or intended to write into this book, as they do have a lot to say on the subject so that it crosses every aspect or at least many aspects of the personal Christian life. However, with time, I once again changed my mind that it isn't the best to do so. Therefore, I broke it up again into fragments of different books. The books I "broke off" were more in number than those I merged, and with time, God willing, and by his grace... will be published very soon too. This book and others to be published soon, are therefore good to help prepare the Christian for the "end-time" joys." Of these books I have published a number of them and it is most gratifying to say that this book is the most major of them all. So my mission is almost complete.

In writing this book, I hope to share with my readers some vital things that can help nourish our relationship with God. I suppose that the quality of one's relationship with another is determined by the quality of time spent in each other's presence. Therefore, I believe also that the quality of our relationship with God depends on the quality of time spent in his presence. How can we have this residing presence of God which shall enable us to

build a warm and quality relationship with our Maker? This is a question I seek to answer in this book.

I love music, church music. I love hymns and godly songs. I love purely instrumentals of godly songs. I once heard an acapella music album titled "In His Presence." I love the songs in this album. I may not be able to testify of the lives of those who sang these songs I have come to love, but the songs are full of both beauty and spiritual meaning. To satisfy my craving for these songs I love, as I searched the Internet for it I bumped into an mp3 that had a very long duration with the title "In His Presence." I thought it was the whole album without intermission. I downloaded and found that it was more of a sermon and not music at all. I was not too happy to see that the audio was a sermon and not a song having used my precious data to download it, but I thought it a good idea to settle down and listen to it as it was supposed to be helpful, being more of a sermon. Of course a sermon ought to be helpful. However, what I heard shocked me. The speaker was blabbing away and saying things like "we are here at the beach, the breeze is cool, the environment is cheering, amen? Amen. We have our lunch boxes, with snacks and refreshments here at the south of town, amen? Amen. We are here together in God's presence enjoying ourselves, amen? Amen..." He went on and on just talking and shocking me, dazing me, and giving me a heart attack. We'll have no choice but to feel sorry for such mis-interpreters of scriptures. They believe that if you want results, you can get results at any time and any day provided you use the right formula. They believe also in conjuring formulas by dragging texts at random out of the Bible and they quite successfully got a formula to win our sympathy. They read in the Bible that "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11). So they assume that it is

the joy of lunch boxes at a beach where there is a cool breeze that yields the fullness of the joy of God's presence. Foolish.

Down the ages we have seen men who have a very wrong understanding of the presence of God. I remember watching a documentary in which a man went building a cathedral with really expensive precious stones, and when asked why he preferred this to clothing the poor children running about naked in the cold of Europe where he was building the cathedral, he said he wanted to build a structure of which when you step into it, you felt the presence of God. How laughable. Yea, how pitiable.

However, to as many that want to experience the presence of God which is beyond what lunch boxes, bananas, cold breeze, and costly stones can afford, I seek to lend my little knowledge which may aid you ascend into his presence. Here, I do not mean the visiting, the passing, or the imaginary presence, but the residing manifest presence. That residing presence, which remains with us from day to day, and hour to hour, is what I seek to write about.

Though my knowledge on these things are grossly inadequate and my experience of the Holy One not worth mentioning, yet do I suppose, like in the words of A.W. Tozer, "if my fire is not large it is yet real, and there may be those who can light their candle at its flame." Though the fire be not large, yet by its tender flame, under favourable conditions not reliant on the potency of that little flame, a whole world can be set on fire. In this book therefore we shall seek to walk by the truth and verity of scriptures and progress in it from stage to stage.

The manifestation of God's presence is one that is very important

to us as Christians. To the fallen man, the concept of God always seems abstract and this is the major reason why people come up with idols as a representation of God. Not being content with a mere abstract deity they need something upon which they could anchor their imaginations of God for the lack of the richness of his manifest presence. Not that this should be a credit to idol worshipers as if their idols signifies that they indeed thirsted after the unseen God, for we know that their idols are representations of malign spirits and not the One, True, and Living God. For being deceived in their spirits that these are representations of gods indeed, they worship them. But the same way it is with the natural man, when presented with the truth about the One, True, and Living God, though he believes in God he may still conceive God as an abstract being and not one who he can relate with personally and intimately. God seems to be mere theological and not actual. But God ought to be more than a theological being to us. I don't think it would be right to confidently make any affirmation about God if you haven't experienced him beyond what you read or are told about him. If he is real, why not experience his manifestation too, that when you witness about him to others you shall be telling them not of whom you've merely read about, but of him in whose manifest presence you dwell in from day to day? If that be your case, you shall witness about him with more confidence and conviction.

The apostle John, having drawn close to God and his Son in person and through the written and spoken word of Christ, wrote in 1 John 1:1-3, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was

with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The apostle was bolder to declare what he declared because he had seen, and touched, and heard, and looked, and handled those things which he declares. He declared that those things were manifest on account of these experiences and not apart from them. He has seen them to be a reality and not just an abstract theory.

If we don't experience God beyond the letters of his word, though the letters be a perfect light by which we may apprehend his Majestic Holiness, yet must we by taking heed to those things written draw close to him for a rich experience of him, for those things are written not just for us to know what is written but to draw us to him. And there, in his residing manifest presence, know him better and with fuller conviction that shall make our heavenward journey sweeter as we go along in the company of the Most High.

Dr. Selwyn Hughes wrote, "You see, it is impossible to keep up the practice of Christian principles and perform our Christian duties in the way they should be performed when our attitude to God or our view of Him is erroneous..." The world is bound to present to us a distorted view of God. Even the person who frequents the church the most is very prone to having a very distorted view of God, particularly in our days. The man who has no religious bearing in life and does not go to church has probably no view of God, and the man who goes to church has a view of God, yet is that view prone to distortion. Sorry for the man that sits under the influence of an ignorant man as a pastor who shall fill his head with all manner of erroneous views of God. It's a sad reality that the pulpit of our churches are full of

people who either out of sheer ignorance or filthy lucre give their members an erroneous view of God. And this, according to Dr. Selwyn Hughes, will negatively affect our practice of the Christian principle and the way we perform our Christian duties. So the view of God we have is of cardinal importance that we can't let it slip. We can't bequeath the responsibility of having a right view of God to others in a thoroughly derailed world. We owe ourselves the responsibility of attaining and maintaining a right view of God by all means. If we can have a rich personal experience with God, whatever erroneous views of God will be straightened out. No amount of lofty jargon can distort that view. It is cast in the stone of a rich experience of God.

It is written, "But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (Ephesians 5:13 - 14). Our lives ought to make God manifest to the world, but first before we can be lights to make him manifest we must receive light from Christ. If we have a distorted view of God we shall manifest distorted notions about God. And it is often better to have no notion about God than to have a distorted view of God. And so a good, effective, and triumphant Christian life depends heavily on the Christian's view of God. As we experience his manifest presence our lives shall make him manifest in a clear and bright light.

The experience we have of Christ shall enable us to know deep things of the spirit beyond what heretics and sophists can deceive us out of. There is a hymn by Charles Wesley which starts with the words, “Long have I seemed to serve Thee, Lord,” in which he gave a fitting answer to a sophist, not by deep words of wisdom or philosophy, but by simple narration of

his personal experience with Christ. I recommend the hymn to the reader so he can see how the mere narration of a personal experience with God silenced a sophist without saying anything which was directly against the arguments of the sophist. We also find this truth in scriptures where the seeming illiterate who had been blind until recently teach the scholarly Pharisees that Jesus was indeed the Christ. When interrogated his simple response was this, "... one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." (John 9:25). The one thing he knew was not what he learnt in the school of Socrates or Plato. No, the one thing he knew that stood as an irrefutable proof of his argument was his encounter with Christ. When we have a rich experience of God by dwelling in his manifest presence, we shall know deep things about him which shall in turn make us useful in the service of God.

This experience should not be seen as something needed as a one time experience. A one time experience shall not be enough. It must be a continual experience from day to day. That is why I described it as a residing presence, not a passing one. Of the baptism of our Lord, John the Baptist testified in John 1:33, "And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." The Spirit descended and remained on him. So must our experience of God be. It is not just that passing descent, but the descent of the Spirit of God and his remaining on us.

When the children of Israel were crossing the Jordan river the arc of God's presence was to go ahead of them into the river and as soon as the feet of the priests who bore the ark touched the river it parted. And they were to remain in the midst of the

river till all the children of Israel had completely passed over. And when, after the children of Israel had passed over, the priest left the midst of the river it flowed back. This serves as a perfect allegory of the importance of his residing presence for the ark of the Covenant is called the ark of his presence. His residing presence. That is how we too must go through the Jordan of life to the promised land, our Heavenly abode above. His presence, signified by the arc of the covenant, must be with us all through our crossing over into our eternal abode. Should it leave while we haven't crossed completely over we'd get drowned. We therefore must desire, not a passing presence of God, but his residing manifest presence.

This experience shall help us in all the aspects of our Christian life. It shall help us in our personal devotion, in our Christian service to God, in our interpersonal relationships, in judgment and understanding God's will, in reaching heaven safely, and every other way. So the importance of the things discussed in this book can't be overemphasised. So let's take it seriously.

Just a little not very important thing before we go on. I may be wrong but I don't like the idea of using the word "saint" to designate prominent Christians of the past. This may be because I don't have a proper understanding of the practice of calling great Christians of the past saints yet. My understanding on the matter is; if the word "saint" is used to refer to Christians we are certain made it to heaven, then we can't use it for anyone because we can't be certain about those who made it to heaven as yet. If a saint is regarded as one who is a Christian and lived uprightly, then every good Christian is a saint, and so calling some bygone Christians saints cannot be a way of distinguishing one Christian from another. Finally, I've seen some people addressed as saints who I didn't perceive as possessing anything

saintly. So when I don't call any saint, even those who have a conspicuously victorious Christian life, it is not to disrespect their glorious memory. It is just that I don't think any should be addressed this way for the reasons mentioned. Maybe if in future I have a better understanding that differs from this on the matter I may join in the practice of calling people saints, but for now I can't except for those who can't be identified without the word of saint, like Saint Francis of Assisi.

The book is lengthy, yet don't fly through it, don't run, don't even walk continuously through it. Go through as slowly as required. I advise the reader to stroll through it, take your time, stroll through, sit down and ponder, meditate, then proceed, and rest again. I do believe that this is the best way to get the best of this book.

Also, this book is probably the book that has taken me the longest time to write. I had started the conception of it in 2012. I had abandoned it severally before finally completing it. Due to the length and inconsistency, it is possible to find some repetitions in the book and possibly repetitions of points from my previous books though I had carefully gone through to ensure that there's no needless repetition. But if you still find any it wasn't intentionally done to bore you. However it is safer to run the risk of repeating points than to omit points in the bid to avoid repetitions as the apostle Paul wrote, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." (Philippians 3:1). To repeat things is safe and to omit anything for fear of repetition is unsafe. And again the blessed bishop Athanesius of Alexandria wrote, "it is better to submit to the blame of repetition than to leave out anything that ought to be set down." Let me walk in this wisdom of our grand predecessors in the

faith.

I pray that as you read, God will be glorified above all. I pray that you will have a deeper experience of God and have his residing manifest presence always. Amen.

Ayomikun

CHAPTER 1: WHAT DIDYOU GO TO SEE IN JERUSALEM?

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."
(John 4:21)

I have noticed what level of spirituality people have attached to pilgrimage, and it baffles me that such a practice should be prevalent in the church. The question I stand to ask the Jerusalem pilgrim is simply this, "what did you go to see there?" Certainly he'd think it were possible to defend such waste of time and resources in achieving zero spirituality. Christ left the tomb a long time ago but people still go there from year to year to say hello. Or maybe not say hello but just to see something. The something I don't know what.

It is true the angels invited the first pilgrims, so to speak, saying, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay," (Matthew 28:6), but he said that because they didn't know he was risen. They probably came to embalm his dead body. But how shall we with full conviction of his resurrection go to look at an empty tomb? What justification do we who have countless proof and witnesses of his resurrection have to go visiting an empty tomb? Usually what the Jerusalem pilgrims say is their benefits according to what I read online are as follows;

1. It enriches the soul. They believe that while you go from place to place where God was experienced it makes your soul richer. I really thought we could have left such errors to those of superstitious beliefs, but we imbibe it most gladly. Good works and attaining to, or receiving the hidden treasures from the word of God are what enriches the soul. Good works certainly do not involve going on pilgrimage, therefore going on pilgrimage has no spiritual benefit in enriching the soul.

2. It helps us appreciate what is written in the Bible. They believe that when you go to the tomb for example you'd appreciate what was written about Jesus' burial and resurrection. Perhaps the thought that an angel stood about where you are standing now would make you shriek. That too has no spiritual benefit. I can assure you most confidently that you would appreciate what is written in the Bible when you go on your knees far much more than when you go to Jerusalem.

3. It helps renew your faith. Well that is interesting. What was it that made the faith of the pilgrim to be worn out that he seeks to renew it? I suppose also renewal of our faith is to be done in the quiet place of prayer, fasting, reading and meditating on the word of God. By the way, the Bible did not say faith cometh by going to Jerusalem, but by hearing and hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). If your faith for any reason becomes worn out, returning to the inexhaustible fount from which you got the faith is how to renew it. Anybody who truly has faith should find it easy to trace precisely its source if he needed to know where it could be renewed. Going to Jerusalem won't renew your faith,

brothers and sisters.

Among many of the heresies rejected by the reformers such as prayers for the dead, pardons, indulgences, excommunications, absolutions, etc., the reformers also condemned pilgrimages. It is written in the book The History of The English Reformation by William Henry Beckett, "Looking through the records of these and other offenders, we find the charges brought against them the usual ones of Lollard doctrine: disbelief in transubstantiation, condemnation of pilgrimages, prayers to images and saints, of confession to priests, and of taking of oaths; their contention for the priesthood of all believers, the right of priests to marry; that the Pope hath no power to bind and loose on earth; that the observance of fast day and festival is not binding; that prayers made in all places are acceptable to God, and that the Catholic Church is only the congregation of the elect, i.e., the faithful." The reformers came out of these sets of superstitious and erroneous beliefs. We too accept most of what they condemned to be condemnable, but we somehow still hold on to the erroneous belief of pilgrimages. Not that pilgrimage or going to Jerusalem is a sin so as to equate it with stealing or murder, but it is heresy to attach any spiritual relevance or benefit to travelling there.

To this agrees the words of à Kempis Thomas when he wrote saying, "Many run to diverse places to visit the memorials of departed Saints, and rejoice to hear of their deeds and to look upon the beautiful buildings of their shrines... Often in looking at those memorials men are moved by curiosity and novelty, and very little fruit of amendment is borne away, especially when there is so much careless trifling and so little true contrition." The travelling about for spiritual purposes that don't bear the fruit of the spirit is worthless. And since one can bear spiritual

fruit without these travels, the travel itself is of no benefit.

It would be okay if people said they were going on tourism in Jerusalem for amusement than to say they're going there for a spiritual purpose. But why should something done in the light of the spiritual be done for amusement? Why should so much be spent, both in money, time and resources, on expensive amusements when you could as well amuse yourself on a cheap game console, if amusement were so important.

Some may say they're going there for historical research. I am not in the right place to judge in this, but I seriously doubt that a Jerusalem of today would have any tangible artefact that would present any truth of the Jerusalem of long ago. The terrain must have been changed by great wars, diverse natural occurrences and disasters including earthquakes, etc. must have taken their course. We know that at least Jesus spoke about the total destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), which was well fulfilled and we know that other great and highly destructive wars have been waged on that land ever since. While some things remaining may be relevant, some destroyed artefacts may have as well been fabricated to deceive people that they were the true artefacts. Many structures still standing for pilgrims to view ought to have collapsed by natural means, but somehow, by human intervention they were made to stand so the pilgrims would continue to have something to see. So I doubt the accuracy of whatever the outcome of such a research would bring. But let us say it were possible to have good artefacts for research in Jerusalem, still let it be said that one is going there for research and studies, not for a spiritual purpose. Research and studies does not necessarily translate to spiritual progress or intimacy with God, rather it can even work an adverse effect to our spiritual progress. But I am convinced that whatever research

is done in Jerusalem today to draw tangible meaning of Bible days may not be worth the paper upon which the research is done.

Throughout scriptures we can see that the omnipresence of God is affirmed. It is written, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:24). God fills not just the earth but the heavens also. How should we think that he is only in Jerusalem and that his presence can only be felt there, or that he's specially located at Jerusalem and that his presence can be felt specially there, though he could be seen elsewhere. Just like a king being seen usually in his castle, but can be occasionally seen elsewhere. When you see him elsewhere you'd probably see him and few guards and a modest procession that is fitting for a king, but when you see him in his castle you'd see him in all his glory. This seems to me the notion pilgrims have about God. There's nothing of that nature with God. He fills the heaven and earth. There's no place where he can't see at each and every point in time. There's no place that he's not.

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." (John 4:21). Under the assurances of such promises it is sad to see that some people still think that God can be specially found in Jerusalem and place undue importance to pilgrimage. If we seek to experience God and understand him and his word thoroughly, we could draw near to him in any place we find ourselves. He is visible to every genuine heart. Seeing him in all his glory has nothing to do with geographical location.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, “go wheresoever ye will, if your Lord

go with you, ye are at home.” The Bible has said God is with those that have a pure heart and clean hands. If we have clean hands and a pure heart the Lord shall go with us and we shall be at home wherever we go. Everywhere shall be our Jerusalem.

But let us be clear that God is not localised. God is not trapped in Jerusalem. It was the hope of the Pharisees to trap him in the tomb, but it is not in vain the hymn writer wrote, "up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over his foes." He is everywhere at the same time. If only we knew what he required of us, we'd have experienced him so richly and divinely. In this book, I seek to talk on the true way to experience God's residing manifest presence.

Prayer: Dear Father, seeing you're not trapped in Jerusalem but are present everywhere, give us the grace and disposition of heart fit to reside in your presence both now and always. Thank you dear Father. Amen.

CHAPTER 2: ABOUT THE COVER

"And the LORD went before them... by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light."
(Exodus 13:21)

"For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."
(1 John 1:2)

When I started thinking about the cover to be used for this book I thought of different concepts, though I was fascinated by some I didn't think they represented the subject to be discussed well. So as I have done for some of my previous books I prayed to God for an idea and I saw in my spirit fire coming down from heaven just as I tried to depict on the front cover. After thinking about this I realised that there are diverse times in scriptures in which the presence of God was manifested by fire coming down from heaven with the best representation of our subject matter being the pillar of fire by night. The pillar with which God led the children of Israel to the promised land. While the children of Israel journeyed his presence went with them in the pillar of cloud by day, but by night it was in the pillar of fire. As we journey to our eternal home to our eternal rest through this world of darkness, his presence is that which can guide us home. So while there are other instances of the presence of God being made manifest in a pillar of fire as when it descends from on high, the major scene I meant to depict is the pillar of fire

that led the children of Israel to the promised land.

In Sinai also the children of Israel witnessed the manifest presence of God in a flame of fire. Of this flame it is written, "And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness." (Deuteronomy 4:11). They witnessed the presence of God in the fire, in the voice, and dreadful sight. To this the children of Israel pleaded with Moses saying, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die." To those who hadn't experienced his presence like Moses who had drawn quite close to God, it was a sight that inspired mortal fear. To this Moses responded, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you..." GOD IS COME. The effect of this manifestation was the testimony, "... we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth." (Deuteronomy 5:24). WE HAVE SEEN. That manifestation of God's presence proved that God, the Most High, does talk and relate with man. That manifestation destroyed whatever notion of God they may have had in Egypt of dead gods that can't see, hear, talk, move, and do the things that a living being can do. All that notion was dispelled and they confessed, "we have seen this day that God... liveth."

Another instance of fire descending out of heaven is in the account of Elijah and the prophet of Baal. Now, it is written that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). Evidences play an important role in our faith. When the Israelites were bent on the worship of Baal, it seems to me that there was a case of uncertainty about who to follow between Baal and the Living God which was not directly pointed out in scriptures except where it is written, "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How

long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him..." (1 Kings 18:21). This seems to me that there were doubts in the minds of the people. The concept of the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt by mighty, powerful, and manifest signs seemed to have faded away in the sands of time and erased by the machinations of the deluded political leaders, who felt that idol worship was the only way to keep the faction of Israelites that had broken away from the house of David, yet the house of Judah remained there as a sign to them that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was their God. This enforced alienation from the living God and the witness the house of Judah gave seemed to have put the people of Israel in a state of uncertainty. So Elijah put forth a challenge to provide an evidence. A manifest evidence to clear the doubts of the Israelites and to enable them follow the living God with one mind. And we know the story how the prophets of Baal in their numbers tried to make their god answer by fire to no avail. Elijah mocked them for he knew their god was not God. Then he later came, offered his sacrifice, prayed and God answered by fire, a manifest evidence of power. And when his power was manifested the whole people, now being fully convinced without any trace of doubt that the Lord is God, shouted with one accord, "The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God." (1 Kings 18:39).

This is what happens when we live in the manifest presence of God. It dissolves all doubts. It gives assurance and confidence about the things of God. While we don't have the pillar of fire to serve as light as we journey through life, we have a more blessed guide. Chiefly the Word of God in flesh and in written word to guide us through this world of woe to our blessed eternal abode. For it is written of that word, "The entrance of thy words giveth light." (Psalm 119:130). The written word, our

Bible which we possess and take about with us, if looked upon, is by no means inferior to the pillar of fire in divine wonders. As if that were not enough we also have the Word of God made flesh for our sakes, Christ our Lord. We needn't go into the wonders of the birth, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Shall any light be compared to the Sun of Righteousness? The light at night that went before the children of Israel gave them light at night, yet did they walk in the night. But the Sun of Righteousness gives us day and dispels the night entirely. In manifesting of divine wonders, the pillar of cloud can't be compared to the Word, in flesh and in text, neither can it be compared in permanence. That promise of permanence is to the end of the age while the pillar of cloud ceases to be once they had arrived at their Canaan. The Lord himself promised, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20). In these far greater and mightier wonders before our eyes we too can much more declare, "God is come," and "we have seen that God doth talk with man, and he liveth."

In the face of wavering Christianity, doubts, compromises, outright obstinacy of unbelief amongst professing Christians, and the challenges of pseudo religious beliefs, it is time, like in the days of Moses and Elijah, to ask God to manifest his power and presence in our individual lives, church, nation, and world to dissolve all doubts. If God must move through his world, nations, and church, he must move through his individuals. It is time to yield ourselves as individuals to God that he may manifest himself to us and start his work in us.

Here's a hymn by Thomas Davis in 1864:

"Sweet is the light, whate'er it be,
That leads us to the Lord;

And sure are they, who seek His face,
To find their great reward.

A star once led a chosen few
To gaze with raptured heart
Upon the infant Savior's form,
And costliest gifts impart.

More blest are we, although not led
To Him we worship thus:
The star is gone; the risen Sun
Reveals Himself to us.

O may His beams yet dearer grow,
Till ours be that bright crown
Received where He for ever shines,
A Sun that goes not down!"

Amen.

Prayer: Dear Father, as we commence this journey on the subject of your manifest residing presence, go with us and lead us aright. Lead us by the light of your word to the blessed end of a more intimate life long relationship with you. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER3: UNEXPECTED MANIFESTATIONS

"When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence."
(Isaiah 64:3)

"... the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave..."
(1 Kings 19:11 - 13)

Before we go further into this book, it is good to also establish one fact that the manifestations of God are sometimes not in the ways we look for them just as his answers to our prayers don't usually come in the ways we expect them to. Late Selwyn Hughes once wrote that if we ask God for light, we shouldn't be surprised if that light scorches us. Such are the ways of God. Mysterious and beyond finding out.

To some, as we saw in the introduction, the presence of God was fullness of joys which they defined as the joy of cool

breeze, lunch boxes, bananas and all. To others the presence of God is all about getting things from him such as divine healing, divine promotions, divine private jets, divine grilled fish, divine toothpick, and all. It is all about us, us, us, and us. But when we talk about the manifest presence of God indeed, not the distorted and misinformed notions of his presence, we shall see that it is rarely what we expect. As we look at the evidence of the manifest presence of God, kindly remove from your mind all that fantasies about fleshly and worldly gratifications.

The prophet Isaiah said something about the manifest presence of God. He said he did terrible things that they looked not for. The inadequacies or errors of the ideas that have been sold to us about God's presence may shock us when we experience the real thing. It is very rare to see one who comes into the manifest presence of God and realise it to be what he previously expected it to be.

The life of saints always proves to be a life of disappointments when they come close to God for a loving relationship. This is not because he doesn't prove to be trustworthy but because we fail to understand his ways. It is written of the two disciples who went down to Emmaus that they said, "But we trusted that it had been he [Christ] which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done." (Luke 24:21). These they said expressing how their expectation had been disappointed and their trust let down. "But we had trusted..." said they. That expressed the pain of heart they were in for it was a matter of trust and not a matter of wish. Their very countenance was very sad for when Christ had found them his question was, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" (Luke 24:17). Had they not walked with Christ prior to his

crucifixion that trust wouldn't have been, and not having such a trust it couldn't have been let down. So such a disappointment could only be experienced by the saints who have walked with God or endeavoured to do so. Yet walking with him they still found it hard to understand his ways,

This reality can be seen all through scriptures for example how the prophet Habakkuk interceded for Israel when God had told him of the terrible things he had appointed the Babylonians to do in Israel and said:

"Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?"
(Habakkuk 1:12 - 17)

The choices of God as revealed to him obviously went against all he thought that God can and will do. He therefore presented his shocking view of these things to God. God didn't flinch on his stance to send the Babylonians to crush his people. The man wrestled with this thought in his mind and couldn't get to

understand it. Indeed to the very end of the book, after all the discussions he had with God, there wasn't a sign that he understood why God would choose such a punishment for his people. This caused him much confusion and perplexity, and such confusion brings misery to the mind for he said, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops." (Habakkuk 3:16). The pain of seeing sinners prevailing over the righteous in whatever thing was always a thing hard for saints to stomach. It was extremely devastating to the prophet.

He found no comfort for such misery but in surrendering to God's will and to trust in the fact that though he could not understand him, yet whatever God does must of necessity be good. In this state of mind the prophet rendered one of the most beautiful lines of all times saying, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments." (Habakkuk 3:17 - 19). This was an expression of a heart truly and totally surrendered to God. He didn't find the answers he sought and God's ways were beyond comprehension, yet he found comfort in the God of his salvation and strength.

Bishop Augustine of Hippo too grieved at the falling of the predominantly Christian Rome. It grieved the man to behold the places perceived as the cities of God being ravaged by godless

barbarians. In his grief he wrote his book, "The City Of God," in which he consoled the grieving Christians to turn their eyes heavenward and gave an answer to barbarians who gloried in the sack of Roman cities and derided the Christian faith and the Christian people. These things grieved the man much as can be seen in this his book.

The Lord himself showed how contrary to our mundane reasoning his ways are. From everything man would expect from Christ, we expect him to be peaceful and friendly and all, but hear him speak, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law." (Luke 12:49 - 53). He is the Prince of Peace. How is the Prince of Peace supposed to reign? Printing posters of peace messages and pasting them everywhere? Creating awareness about peace? Forming pressure groups to foster peace? But to God, that was not the way, he reigns as the Prince of Peace by sending fire on the earth! By withholding peace and giving division. To set people one against the other even from the same family. And yet by this means shall he not merely bring peace to men but to individuals and shall make them have peace within themselves. When you belong to Christ you have peace in your nature.

So, the saints in their walk with God and in drawing close to him do find in that walk a lot of grief. But as said, this is

because we fail to understand God. The men who took a journey to Emmaus were sad, Jesus came over to find out why exactly they were sad, but after their explanation Jesus' response was, "O fools, and slow of heart..." (Luke 24:25). They were sad, not because God had proven untrustworthy but because they were foolish and slow to believe what was written in the prophets. And after Christ had made them understand the mystery of his death, they were then filled with such joy they couldn't explain that when he had vanished from their sight, they said to themselves, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). And in the energy of that joy they returned to Jerusalem despite the fact that it was already dark, so dark that they had said to Christ, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." (Luke 24:29). Yet they themselves went all the way back to Jerusalem being full of joy. Knowing God and understanding him is joy unspeakable and full of glory. Surrendering to him is peace.

As the hymnodist wrote, "God moves in mysterious ways," and mysteriousness is unpleasant to man whose innate aim is to master all he encounters. He masters his world in making to grow what he wills and when he wills, and this he calls agriculture. He masters the sea and can travel over the ocean, and this he calls navigation. He masters the air and can travel in the air across the world in a matter of hours, and this he calls aerodynamics. And the list goes on. And now he's mastering space already. Having this innate yearning, mysteriousness is odious to man. Being calm in the presence of what is beyond our intellect isn't easy. And we sometimes wish to flee from that which we do not comprehend and are confident can't be comprehended. Yet must we surrender to God and accept his mysterious ways in full trust that he who is mysterious is also

perfectly good and perfect in knowledge. Herein shall we find peace through all of life's uncertainties.

So, we must be open to experiencing God in whatever ways he chooses. The method he chooses to manifest himself by shouldn't keep us from coming to him and shouldn't make us pull back when we've experienced him.

Prayer: Dear God and Father, help us to wholly surrendered to you and accept your mysterious ways in simplistic trust. As we experience the richness of your presence, may the yearnings of a carnal mind not drive us away from you. Help us to remain steadfast in your presence as we drink down the profound pleasures of it. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 4:
THE AGONY OF THE PASSING AND ABSTRACT PRESENCE

"And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them."
(Luke 24:28 - 29)

Before we go further into the pages of this book, we need to look at some innate desires of man. The desire that when it isn't gratified it results in agony. No one wants to part with something sweet and pleasant. People want sweet moments to last forever. Babies won't want to part with their sweet candies because it's sweet, employees won't wish to leave a job because it's well paying, and so on, but the bane of the world is that nothing lasts forever. Even the most pleasant life must end in death. The best anyone can do is to make pleasant moments last as long as possible. Succeed in making it as long as you please there shall always be a pain to feel when we must part with pleasant things and moments. The most painful thing about such moments is that there's nothing you can do about it when the time to part with it comes.

The same thing it is with the presence of God. The man who tastes it won't want to part with it. It is written, "In thy

presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11). Not only is there great joy in the presence of God but there is the fullness of it so that there can't be more joy than that which we experience in the presence of God, and the pleasures at his right hand are everlasting. When we experience such immense pleasure, the parting of it is not merely painful but agonising.

It is the innate desire of the soul of a man to experience such joys. This fact is evident in the manifold rituals we see in various religions of the world. There is always a place that functions as a shrine where the followers of such faiths believe they can encounter their deity. A place they hold as a permanent residence for it or them. This is because of man's innate desire to be at one with his God, to have him permanently around. The carnal man with a distorted view of his god has made all manner of shrines for all manner of creatures and call them gods. This proves to us that the innate desire to be at one with one's creator is not one we have upon conversion, it is a desire we are born with for even the pagans and heathen have this longing. The reason for such is because of the agony of parting with one's deity.

This innate longing to have God permanently around can be seen severally in scriptures, this time in the righteous. In the Old Testament we see people building altars when they perceive God is near, particularly Solomon's temple. While such altars may seem like a place of mere worship, it is intended to be a place of residence that one may resort to to meet with God. In the New Testament after Peter and the disciples with him had seen Christ transfigured and the holy prophets talking with him it is written, "And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us

make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said." (Luke 9:33). Tabernacle means a habitation. Anytime one experiences such sweetness of divine pleasure, the first thing that comes to mind is how to make it permanent.

The thought of Christ's departure from his disciples made them so sad with deep sorrow. And all that could be done to prevent his departure was sworn and attempted. Peter swore that he would lay down his life to keep him around, and attempted to fight for Christ but gave up the fight when he realised that Christ wasn't interested in escaping death. He was willing to die for Christ, but was not willing to die with him. So he fled. After the ascension of Christ two disciples took a walk to Emmaus and Christ came and spoke with them. For the sweetness of the conversation with him they had none else to say but, "Abide with us..." (Luke 24:28 - 29). And after his ascent to the skies, the apostles looked keenly up until an angel came and spoke to them. To take their eyes off him wasn't easy.

Exodus 19:21-25 says, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the Lord, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the Lord said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them. So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them." The presence of God must have been so sweet that Moses did not want to leave even when God was charging him

to leave. It must have been so desirable that the people could have been willing to break through the set bounds to look on God.

The same Moses said to God, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” (Exodus 33:15). Moses had tasted richly of the manifest presence of God, and when God said his angel will go with them instead of himself, Moses pleaded that if his own very presence won't go with him in particular, he should not take them away from where they were. It shows that when we taste of God's presence himself we will want him for himself and not for merely what we can get from him. If the angel of the Lord had gone with them they would have reached the promised land anyways. If all Moses sought God for was to get to the promised land, this saying of God that he would send his angel to go with them rather than he himself would have been most welcome by Moses. But Moses wanted God for himself. He wanted God to be with him in person. He just could not bear the thought of the sweetness of that presence coming to an end. To him that has tasted of the presence of God, he'd never wish to leave it anymore on any account.

There is also the agony of the abstract presence. This agony can also be seen in the ways of the heathen to reflect man's innate desire to have the presence of God manifestly, not abstractly. The soul of man yearns for a God who can say, "... handle me, and see..." (Luke 24:39). Not only does man desire a residing presence of his deity but he also desires that presence to be manifest. The altars and shrines reflect the fact that man desires the residing presence of God, the idols themselves placed in those altars or shrines reflect man's desires to have God's presence manifestly. For it is written, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in

the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." (Romans 2:14 - 15). The practices of the Gentiles do reveal a lot of things about the innate desire of man. However, not knowing God, these desires, by the craft of the Devil, has led men to demons and not to the living God.

Thanks be to God that in Christ God has come to dwell with us. Not in shrines or altars but in our hearts. This is what we celebrate each Christmas. It is not the birthday of Christ, but the coming of God to dwell with us in the person of Christ. People over the years have entirely missed the essence and import of Christmas and celebrate it as a birthday party rather than the celebration of God coming to dwell with us. For this reason, it doesn't seem like such an important celebration to some who may term themselves conservatives. Why should they celebrate the birthday of Christ whose birthdate we don't know. But if we know that the essence to be the birth of Christ and not his birthday and the import of this, then we do exceedingly rejoice at the remembrance of this great kindness of God toward our race. The kindness that takes away our agony.

Knowing the import of this and how it quenches the thirst of the innate desires of man, Johann Sabastian Bach (1685-1750) composed the beautiful piece, "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring." Of course he is the joy of man's innate desiring. At last we can have our God permanently with us. Not merely in a building, but with us everywhere in our hearts. The earnest of even a greater joy which shall last for all eternity. All through the same Christ.

Seeing the agony of the passing presence, when we seek the presence of God, we ought not to seek it in a way that makes it a mere passing presence. Even in the flesh we must seek to have his presence permanently with us. In all these are the words of the title of this book complete. Not just the residing abstract presence that can't be felt, but the sweet residing manifest presence. And though Christ is ascended to heaven, if we shall draw close to him in loving fellowship yet shall we feel him manifestly with us. Chiefly in our spirits and if he wills it we shall also behold him with our eyes and feel him bodily while still in the flesh.

The sweetness of the residing manifest presence of God takes away the agonies of experiencing the passing and abstract presence of God. Let us walk together in the pages of this book as we explore this very important topic. Thank you and God bless you.

Prayer: Dear Lord and God, you at whose right hand there are pleasures forevermore. Teach us to seek your presence that we may dwell with you and experience, not your passing presence but your residing manifest presence. May we walk with you all our days in this body and then live with you eternally in your kingdom. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 5:
WALKING WITH GOD

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"
(Micah 6:8)

"... they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."
(Revelation 3:4)

I remember attending an Easter retreat in which a song was sung by a choir, and I fell in love with the song. Not just for the melody but most especially for the wordings. I can't remember the exact wordings but it went something like this:

Walk with the Lord,
It means to journey with him,
Walk in his words...

If you really want to get to heaven
just walk, walk, walk with the Lord.

I agree completely for going to heaven requires walking with God.

The whole idea of journeying with God was what I tried to portray on the cover of this book. When I started thinking about the cover to be used for this book I thought of different

concepts, though I was fascinated by some, especially by the artistic brilliance of some concepts I saw online, I didn't think they represented the subject to be discussed well. The designs I worked on as a result all bothered around someone praying, or reading the Bible, but they didn't give me the satisfaction I needed. So as I have done for some of my previous books I prayed to God for an idea and I saw in my spirit fire coming from heaven. There are two instances of that in scriptures which come to my mind when I observe this. The first is when the children of Israel came out of Egypt guided by God by a pillar of fire by night. This is the main idea that was used in the cover of this book. But another instance is the encounter between the prophets of Baal and Elijah where God answered Elijah's prayer with fire from heaven. These two instances represent most perfectly the idea of the residing and manifest presence of God.

In the story of the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, the presence of God was manifested in two ways, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. These things represented his firm and manifest presence. It is written, "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." (Exodus 13:21 - 22). We see three things here. The pillars meant God himself was there with them. It was he himself who went with them in the pillars. He was manifestly with them. The second is that the pillars represented his unflinching presence. It was with them day and night and he took them not away from them their entire journey. Lastly, his presence gave them light and shade. A thing that made their journey bearable as long as it was.

These things represent very well our heavenward journey. Egypt represents this world and Canaan represents our eternal abode. To make it home to our heavenly abode, we need his presence. We need it manifestly, unflinchingly, and perpetually. The light of his presence must mark the road that leads us home and must succour us from the blazing heat of the tribulations of this world. Without his presence we shall make a shipwreck. So in the journey of the Israelites to Canaan we find a perfect representation of the residing manifest presence of God as well as its role in our heavenward journey.

A close walk with God gives us everything we need in life and death. Peace, joy, fulfilment, solace, and all can be found in his presence. I so love the hymn of William Cowper (1731–1800) that puts it so well. The first and last verse of this hymn goes:

"O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

"So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb."

To the second instance where we witness a fire coming down from heaven in scriptures. Before we look at the events about Elijah and the fire that came down, let's note that it is written that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). Evidences play an important role in our faith. When the Israelites were bent on the worship of Baal, it seemed there was a case of uncertainty about who to

follow between Baal and the Living God which was not directly pointed out in scriptures except where it is written, "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him..." (1 Kings 18:21). This seems to me that there were doubts in the minds of the people. The concept of the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt by mighty, powerful, and manifest signs seemed to have faded away in the sands of time, and erased by the machinations of the deluded political leaders who felt that idol worship was the only way to keep the faction of Israelites that had broken away from the house of David, yet the house of Judah remained there as a sign to them that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was their God. This enforced alienation from the living God and the witness the house of Judah gave seemed to have put the people of Israel in a state of uncertainty. So Elijah put forth a challenge to provide an evidence. A manifest evidence to clear the doubts of the Israelites and to enable them follow the living God with one mind. And we know the story how the prophets of Baal in their numbers tried to make their god answer by fire to no avail. Elijah mocked them for he knew their god was no god. Then he later came, offered his sacrifice, prayed and God answered by fire, a manifest evidence of power. And when his power was manifested in the fire the whole people, now being fully convinced without any doubt that the Lord is God, shouted with one accord, "The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God." (1 Kings 18:39). This is what happens when we live in the manifest presence of God. It dissolves all doubts and straightens out all distortions. As the fire consumed everything on the altar, water and all, so shall it consume everything that inhibits our heavenward journey.

In the face of wavering Christianity, doubts, compromise,

challenges of pseudo religious beliefs, abominable practices being enforced in the high places of power, it is time, like in the days of Elijah, to ask God to manifest his power and presence in our individual lives, church, nation, and world. If God must move through his world, nations, and church, he must move through his individuals. It is time to yield ourselves to God that he may start his work in us. It is time to walk with him in white.

Strangers And Sojourners With God

"... ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (Leviticus 25:23)

"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Hebrews 13:14)

We have seen how that the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan land was a perfect allegory of our heavenward journey. For on the day they left Egypt God commanded the children of Israel to kill the Passover lamb and Jesus is that Passover lamb. Our heavenward journey starts with him as our Passover lamb and ends with him as the reigning King. While Egypt signifies earth, Canaan signifies Heaven. On the night that the children of Israel left Egypt, God said to them concerning how they should eat the Passover, "And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover." (Exodus 12:11). We stay here in this world as merely pilgrims. We are on an heavenward journey and this world is not our home no less than Egypt was not the home of the Israelites.

For those whom God wanted to live in a place, he gave the instruction, "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; (Jeremiah 29:5). This is the command of God when he wants you to dwell in a place for even a brief time. A stark contrast to what we see concerning the Passover. However, Christ our Passover lamb has been crucified and we feed upon his body and drink his blood for we journey home. Our lives therefore must be lived as people on a journey, with our loins girded, our shoes on our feet, and our staff in our hands.

Apart from this world not being our home, neither is it the home of our God. The Lord says, "... ye are strangers and sojourners with me." (Leviticus 25:23). And all the Bible shows how God feels about this world not being his home. When David said he wanted to build God a house to "dwell," mark the word "dwell," this is God's response through prophet Nathan:

"Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?"
(2 Samuel 7:5 - 7)

This is what God said about having a dwelling place on earth. And note how many times he uses the word "walk." The idea of having a temple for himself in Jerusalem did not seem to be a part of his plan at all. He wanted to maintain the identity of a

sojourner dwelling in a tent and a tabernacle. Both being temporary structures. He however accepted the good gesture from his servant David. He accepted to have a house built, not because he wanted it, or that he was now persuaded to reside on the earth, but just out of courtesy to his servant. Many don't know that rejection of offerings of love is rude. That is what you call spurning. You can't reject such offerings without showing the uncultured trait of disdain and contempt for the offerer. There are people whose gifts ought to be rejected, for example, someone of the opposite sex trying to banter towards someone with gifts when the welfare of that person is not their responsibility. There is almost always an evil intent in such gifts. For example some women are in the habit of begging men that don't owe them any responsibility for money. That is an insult to whosoever is actually responsible for their welfare whether it be parent or husband. And knowing women are desirous of such disgraceful gifts, some men offer women gifts in a bid to banter towards them for some unholy purpose. Such ought to be rejected by noble minded women.

I heard a woman tell me of a man who had given her a gift and she accepted it. Then the man took a step further to try to enter into an endearing and ongoing conversation with her and she flared up. This she said trying to show her virtuousness. But the virtue ought to have been in rejecting a gift from someone of the opposite sex who didn't owe you the duty of care. What many don't understand is that when we begin to give and to care for something we naturally fall in love with them. I am a hobbyist gardener and as funny as it may sound I've found myself falling in love with my plants so often just because of the feeling that they owe their wellbeing to me and the pleasure their consequent growth gives me. I have also fallen in love with my snails which I rear because I provide for them. And so I find

it really amusing when I see women accept things like food from a man only to feel offended when he begins to make further advancements thereafter. So virtue is to reject gifts when it comes from people who have no justification to give it. Women who I've noticed are most guilty of this unvirtuous act should learn to be content with what they are provided for by their husbands or by their own selves, and young women should be content with what they are provided for by their fathers. And when gifts pass from one couple to another couple it should pass from man to man or from woman to woman. Any gifts offered outside the bounds of reason ought to be rejected. But when the gifts are noble, like from a child to his parents, a husband to a wife, a friend to a friend, or other unquestionable relation, it is always rude and uncultured to reject gifts. God would not turn down such a loving offer from his servant and so that was how the idea of having a temple for God in Jerusalem was birthed.

However, as said, God did not then choose to stay permanently on the earth, but he merely treated his servant lovingly. When he continued the message to David, he said, "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." (2 Samuel 7:12 - 16). In the message it would be easy for us to say God spoke of Solomon here, but a closer look would prove otherwise. God did not speak of Solomon here but of Christ and

the house he said that would be built for him is not the temple of Jerusalem but the church of Christ. For when he says, "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men..." he spoke of Christ. Solomon did commit iniquity and it is clearly written of him, "But king Solomon loved many strange women... Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father." (1 Kings 11:1 - 4). Though he erred greatly from the ways of God, yet God did not punish him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men. But when Christ bore our sins he was beaten with the rod of men and with the stripes of men. So God was so reluctant about building a house here for himself, though he accepted it it didn't make him relinquish his status of a sojourner. When he gave a promise about his house he referred rather to his church for it is written, "But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." (Hebrews 3:6). Christ was that Son to be beaten with the rod of men and he was the Son to build God a house, not Solomon.

We can see the same mode of conversation also where it is written, "Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years

was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." (John 2:18 - 22). He spoke of his body but they thought he spoke of the temple. It was when his words were fulfilled his disciples remembered, understood what he said, and believed him. The same way when God spoke to David, it was until the fulfilment of it that we could then understand the Son and house he spoke of. So he spoke of Christ and his church, but we think it was Solomon and the temple.

So we could see the kind of supposed difficulty God seemed to be in here, for in accepting the gift of love he must give up his status as a sojourner. It was too difficult or even impossible to give up his sojourner status (probably having utterly rejected the thought of permanently dwelling in this world), yet must he not snub such a loving sacrifice and must reciprocate the show of love with a promise. So he accepted it and gave a promise to him so that there shall be no trace of rejection because rejection will be rude and uncultured. He therefore accepted it as though it were to be a permanent resident here thereby letting go of his sojourner status. He made a promise that was to be understood that he would use the temple and have a house among men, but though he did use the temple in a way, what he meant indeed did not in any way relinquish his sojourner status. So not only is God a sojourner here, but he holds tenaciously and passionately to maintaining the status of a stranger and sojourner. Not even the gift of love could make him feel at home here or relinquish that status.

If God is therefore a stranger and a sojourner in this world, is it any wonder why all that walked with him saw themselves as

pilgrims? It is written, "And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." (Genesis 47:9). Jacob saw himself as a man on a pilgrimage in this world, and he said the same about his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, saying, "in the days of their pilgrimage." David, though he lived an established king in Jerusalem, said, "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." (Psalm 119:54). And again in Psalm 39:12 it is written, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." And it is on this account that we are admonished to live a holy life by apostle Peter when he wrote, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11). It is an aberration for any to wish to walk with God and at the same time wish to feel at home in this world.

As the writer of the Hebrews narrated the stories of those who are considered the heroes of faith, he explained to a great extent the nature of the pilgrimage of the righteous upon the earth where it says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." (Hebrews 11:13 - 16). All the righteous men that

ever lived upon the face of the earth all lived by faith and looking forward to another country. They didn't follow mere fantasies, they were promised of this land, they had seen it afar off and were so persuaded, they held the promises by faith, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers. It was an obvious fact about them that they were strangers and Sojourners here on earth. It was on the account of their consciousness of another land and being a stranger and sojourner here that makes God not to be ashamed to be called their God. So God's relationship with the righteous is based on the fact that they have this mutual status of both being sojourners and strangers here in this world.

The same Hebrews also says, "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Hebrews 13:14). This means we shall have no permanent residence in this world. It does not mean that we shall not have cities that recognise Jesus as Lord and supreme, but it shall not be permanent. Where is Byzantine today? That empire wholly dedicated to Christ. Gone. We must pray for the success and longevity of every nation that recognises the Lordship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and do his will, but either by our death or the dissolving of that nation we shall not belong to a Christian country forever on this earth.

This is not a doleful statement to cause sadness but a glorious one to bring joy and hope. It is a statement that is capable of bringing us from the ashes of this life to the beauty of hope of eternal life. I saw the beauty of this verse when I read the novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Uncle Tom was a fictional deeply devoted Christian slave. Through the pains and rigours of slavery and about the toughest time of his life he read these words, "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Hebrews 13:14). What a comfort that was to him, and I saw the

beauty of that verse like never before hearing it from a slave in deep suffering. Even to the pious rich it brings joy because it informs him that there is a place better than this. So it is a truth we ought to be glad to know. We are only strangers here and our God is a stranger with us.

So, the doctrine that we are sojourners in this earth is a part of the central truths of scriptures. But we must know that we are not alone in this pilgrimage. We are strangers and sojourners with God.

Walking With God

"... they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."
(Revelation 3:4)

Back to the account of how the children of Israel left Egypt. Remember how God says they were to eat the Passover lamb? With their loins girded, shoes on their feet, and staff in their hand, and they were to eat with haste. This is how people are when they are on a journey and not when they are residing in a place. This was how they were when the presence of the Lord, manifested in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, led them through the Red Sea. Just as God was with the children of Israel all through their journey as long as they journeyed at his command, God also resides with those who journey with him on their heavenward journey. In this land of our pilgrimage, God is always on the move. Experiencing God's residing presence therefore requires our walking with him.

That sums up the importance of walking with God. If you want to experience his presence in this world you must walk with him as a stranger and as a sojourner. You won't miss heaven if you do so. We look at life as something in which you need to do so much to have a bright hope for eternity, but the man of God says, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8) summing all of God's demands to just three, doing justly, loving mercy, and as our focus would be, walking humbly with your God. To experience the residing manifest presence of God, we mustn't be standing around but must walk with him.

Countless of the hymn writers knew the sweetness and benefit of walking with God and they expressed it in their hymns. Fanny Crosby wrote;

"gladly will I toil and suffer,
only let me walk with thee."

John Newton wrote;

"I pity all that worldlings talk
Of pleasures that will quickly end;
Be this my choice, O Lord, to walk
With Thee, my Guide, my Guard, my Friend."

The truly regenerated Christian prefers simply to walk with God above all earthly good.

When I say residing, I don't mean being stagnant in a place, but he being ever present with you. I don't mean that we should pitch a tent and invite him in to reside with us for God will not

reside in a tent with a pilgrim. You must have your shoes on your feet, your loins girded, staff in your hands, and if you must eat, you must do so in haste. This is because we are on a journey with God. Even when we eat, it must be in haste so as to continue that journey. I mean by this, that by being ever present with him as he moves on, he remains present with you. To remain present with him you walk with him, and in walking with him, he is present with you. If God passes by and you remain in your spot instead of walking with him, you'd only experience his passing presence, but if you, like Peter and John, rise up and follow him, then shall his presence reside with you. This is the residing presence I'm talking about and shall be talking about all through this book.

What Does It Mean To Walk With God

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:"
(Colossians 2:6)

"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more."
(1 Thessalonians 4:1)

Walking with God is a figurative expression meaning to live one's life with full consciousness of him. When you walk with someone you are fully conscious of their presence, else even though you too walk in the same direction it shall be mere coincidence. To walk with God means to guide your ways

according to the knowledge of him. You can't say you are walking with someone if you are not conscious of him. He'll turn this way and you'll go straight. If you walk with somebody you must be conscious of the person's movements and know where he is going next. To know this may mean you are just watching him and following him, or you know what influences his decisions, for example you know he is going to the restaurant just by the bend, therefore you know he'll take the right at the next junction. So, walking with God is being sensitive to God's injunctions and being close to his heart. A little loss of concentration and he may be out of sight. A simple moment of reluctance cost the lady in the Songs of Solomon the presence of her lover and caused her to lament saying, "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." (Song of Solomon 5:6). In Hosea 5:6, it is also written, "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them." Therefore I suppose the best and most essential occupation of a person willing to live a good life and be victorious in death is walking with God, and to do this we must maintain a steady focus on him.

To walk with God also means to be agreed with him. Of necessity, to walk with somebody, you must be agreed together. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). The answer is simple. Therefore walking with God is living one's life in agreement with God. But does God wishes to agree with us? Does the maker of the universe have time for you and for me? The fact is that he does. It is written, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD..." (Isaiah 1:18). God would not be offering such an invitation if he didn't wish to be in

agreement with us.

Lastly, to walk with God means to please him. We get a sense of this where it is written in the verse quoted earlier, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more." (1 Thessalonians 4:1). In that it says, "how ye ought to walk and to please God..." we can see that walking with God and pleasing him are closely related, if not synonymous. When talking about Enoch, the Bible says, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." (Genesis 5:24). However, it is also written, "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." (Hebrews 11:5). So his walking with God also entailed that he pleased God. Pleasing the one we walk with naturally flows from being in agreement with him/her. When you are in agreement with someone it means the things you do and say are in accordance to his will, and the things he does are in accordance to your own will. This has the natural effect of being pleasing. To maintain the company of someone you must do things that pleases the person to some degree, and the more pleasing our company is the more likely and often that person shall be in our company. Who likes to move with guys who always engage in things he doesn't like or who make him the butt of every joke. Surely, if one finds himself in such a company, it would not be long before he'd have to leave that company. It is the same with God. When our ways don't please him, it is natural for him to withdraw himself. And as we have seen, his withdrawal is often very quiet.

What Defines A Successful Walk With God

"... so shall we ever be with the Lord."
(1 Thessalonians 4:17)

Simply put, a successful walk is that walk that leads to the destination where both parties that consciously walked together desired to arrive at. A successful voyage is one that safely lands at the desired port. As a sojourner with God you are on a journey with him. You have to be mindful of the final destination before you can truly define what a successful walk with him is. A successful walk with God is one in which you arrive safely to the eternal bliss of heaven, to reign eternally with Christ. Any walk with God that stops short of heaven is an unsuccessful walk.

Being mindful that our walk with God is a voyage, the apostle Paul defined the failure of those that didn't make it through as a "shipwreck." He says, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." (1 Timothy 1:19). So the apostle did see that everything that has to do with the Christian life is a form of a voyage. And he says those who have put away the things of faith and a good conscience have made shipwreck. Using the word shipwreck signifies voyage, and those who couldn't make it in good faith to the end being shipwrecked are failures.

A successful walk with God is that which leads us safely to heaven. So everything pertaining to our walk with God ought to last for a lifetime. This is what defines a successful walk with God. Going to heaven is the ultimate essence of our discussion in this book.

The Gloriousness And Benefits Of Walking With God

"... they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."
(Revelation 3:4)

Of all the people you've ever known in greatness, fame, power, wisdom, etc., who would you like to walk with? I'm sure one would scarcely think about God because God is high and above in majesty and loftiness. But here is God saying, "... they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." (Revelation 3:4). Walking with a king is glorious but walking with the King of kings is infinitely glorious.

Walking with God proves your worthiness for the unworthy cannot walk with him. From that statement we can see that God does not walk with the unworthy. The reason of why they shall walk with him given thus; "... for they are worthy." Therefore walking with God shows your worthiness.

Walking with God also enables you to put on God over time. When you walk with someone from day to day you would overtime begin to be like him and he would begin to be like you. The same happens when we walk with God. However, unlike when a man walks with another man in which both change and become like the other, therefore losing some of their former qualities to take in some new, but when he walks with God all the changes come from him and not from God. For it is written, "For I am the LORD, I change not..." (Malachi 3:6). So walking with God makes us transform more and more into his likeness.

It is written in Psalms 65:4, "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." Those who approach unto God, that is those who he causes to draw near to him and dwell in his presence, shall be satisfied with the goodness of his house and temple. Having a taste of his goodness is good enough, but being satisfied is another thing entirely. Such is what his presence affords us.

"If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help." (2 Chronicles 20:9). When we're in God's presence his ear is open to our requests and his help is near. One thing I will assure you, the reader, is that you will have battles, if you choose to be on the Lord's side. But when you walk with God you will always come out victorious. A victorious life is far more sweet than a life of no battles. When you read the life of David for example, you'd find the life of Saul very tragic. This is because David's life was full of battles but they all ended in victories whereas Saul's life ended in woeful destruction. However, compared to the life of David, Solomon's life was very boring. So boring that he wrote a love song of eight chapters. The sweetest life to live is one full of battles and each battle meets with victories. That is epic.

The Worthiness Of Those Who Walk With God

"... they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."
(Revelation 3:4)

This flies in the face of those who claim that Christianity is not about works. If it were not about works, then on what grounds does one prove his worthiness? Note that all that was written to the churches of Asia were written to the church and to Christians everywhere and in every age who believe and have faith in Jesus. But amongst them, only the worthy shall walk with him. The full verse reads, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." (Revelation 3:4). This was directed to a few amidst many. There were works that distinguished them from others. It is the worthiness of their works that enables them to walk with God.

So the privilege of walking with God is earned. Not by our strength, but by the power that comes through his grace. So we must do things that shall make us worthy to walk with him. We shall talk on some of these things as we proceed.

Conclusion

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

(1 John 2:6)

These things we shall look at in more detail in later chapters of this book. But for now we must make it our aim to walk continuously in his presence. As Sojourners with him who desire to go with him to his kingdom and reign with him forever, we must walk as he walked. We must remain in his presence by walking with him every moment. May God help us to walk with him each and everyday and moment in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord and fellow sojourner, teach us to grasp the idea of walking with you to the fullest and walk even as you walk. Teach us to walk with you all our days and by this safely reach our eternal abode and reign with you forever and ever, world without end. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 6: LET'S MEET RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."
(1 Thessalonians 5:12 - 13)

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to present to you Richard of Saint Victor. Richard of St. Victor was a religious thinker. One of the best of his time. We don't know when he was born but he died in the year 1173. He served as the prior of the Abbey of St. Victor which was built in honour of St. Victor who was martyred for refusing to deny Christ. This St. Victor was a man of interesting character. He was of Egyptian origin and had served in the Roman army. Of his death it is written in Wikipedia, "After refusing to offer incense to a statue of the Roman god Jupiter, Victor kicked it over with his foot. The emperor ordered that he be put to death by being ground under a millstone, but the millstone broke while Victor was still alive. He was then beheaded." I loved that kicking part. So fun. Very worthy of the soldier that he was. So the abbey where this Richard served was done in honour of that great saint.

He wrote a number of deeply religious treatises and one of his major works which I've read myself is titled, "Benjamin Minor."

The content of this amazing book contains a good guide for all that pertains to a man's walk with his God. It was when I read this book I realised to another degree that it is possible that by mere reading one could ascend the ladder up to heaven and draw closer and closer to God in rich experiences.

In that book Richard of St. Victor used the family structure of the patriarch Jacob to explain what he terms the mights and virtues of a man's soul. He explains the origin of virtues and mights of the soul and proceeds by explaining causes and effects of these virtues, how one virtue gives birth to another. Also, he speaks on negating virtues and likewise their causes and effects. The summary of his doctrine can be seen in the chart below:

LEAH
Affection

1. **REUBEN:** Dread of pain (fear)
2. **SIMEON:** Sorrow of sin (contrition)
3. **LEVI:** Hope of forgiveness (hope and trust)
4. **JUDAH:** Love and righteousness

BILHAH
Imagination
(Servant of Reason)

5. **DAN:** Sight of pain to come
6. **NAPHTALI:** Sight of joy to come

ZILPAH
Sensuality
(Servant of Affection)

7. **GAD:** Abstinence
8. **ASHER:** Patience

10. **ZEBULUN:** Hatred for sin
11. **DINAH:** Ordained shame

RACHEL
Reason

12. **JOSEPH:** Discretion
13. **BENJAMIN:** Contemplation

This writing of his explains how the virtues of man are related, that is which gives birth to which, and does the same for the vices. It is very important to understand these relations as Christians so we can pilot our lives into the perfections of virtue. We have a brief example of such relations in scriptures where it is written, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:5 - 8). We can see the links in these virtues. And the apostle said that the knowledge of these things (how virtues are related and which births which) is what would make us fruitful in the knowledge of Christ, meaning without them we stand a chance of being barren, and if barren then are we fit for damnation (Luke 13:6-9).

In the chart above, you can see how the virtues are of the free women and how the corresponding vices are of their servants. For example Leah the free woman is termed affection, that is love, but Zilpah her servant sensuality. Then Rachael the free woman is termed reason but Bilhah her servant is termed imagination. The same goes to the children of the free women and of their servants. The children of the free bearing the virtues and the children of their servants bearing the vices. His argument was that by letting the virtuous motions in our members operate freely as of the free women and their children and by keeping the vices under like one would do a servant, so shall we experience the riches and sweetness of God's presence.

What he wrote helped me a lot in understanding the Christian

faith and walk with God and since our focus in this book is walking with God and experiencing the riches of his presence, then his writings would be of immense importance. It has helped shape my mind and so it has also help in shaping the contents of this book to some degree. I recommend his work to the reader for a closer look. It will surely bless you.

So this wonderful presentation of the order of how the Christian progresses in his heavenward journey would serve as our compass in this book. I won't follow it strictly, but it'll guide nonetheless.

So this is the man Richard of St. Victor. Let's give him a round of applause.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Father, as your word says we should know and honour those who labour amongst us, your servant Richard of St. Victor has laboured in providing for us an excellent treatise on how we ought to work with you. Help us to esteem such that their great works may be a blessing to our souls. Thank you heavenly Father. In Jesus' name have I prayed. Amen.

SECTIONAL HYMN

Be Thou my Vision

Attributed to Dallán Forgaill

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;
be Thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom, be Thou my true Word;
be Thou ever with me and I with Thee, Lord;
be Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son,
be Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my Breastplate, my Sword for the fight;
be Thou my whole Armor, be Thou my true Might;
be Thou my soul's Shelter, be Thou my strong Tow'r,
O raise Thou me heav'nward, great Pow'r of my pow'r.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
be Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart,
O High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys, after vict'ry is won;

Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be Thou my Vision, O Ruler of all.

SECTION 2

APPROACHING GOD

CHAPTER 7:
THE PULL OF GOD'S TENDER CORD

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him..."
(John 6:44)

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."
(Jeremiah 31:3)

You see, at this point I feel I have taken too much upon myself. Like a soldier who out of excessive zeal is determined to go to war, and battle every object called enemy. While there was room for peace, he rejects it and insists he must go to war. His compatriots say they won't go with him, but he insists out of zeal that he must go, even if it means to go alone. However on reaching the battle front and seeing what manner of enemy he's faced with, both his zeal and courage fail him. So am I at this point. I don't know much of what I'm about to write about. I am writing about walking or fellowshiping with God but I cannot tell the sequence of one's walk with God. If one doesn't know where to even start off, how shall he even start? I don't know if our walk with God begins at being preached to, or being made to understand the terrors of hell, nor do I know if it begins at knowing the joys of heaven. I don't even know what is essential or which must precede the other. Jesus said "The wind bloweth

where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8). These things are things we can't understand. I wish the Holy Spirit would be the one to write such a book, but since he is not going to do so, I wish I had his understanding about such a subject. But I can't have such knowledge also. So how can I write about walking with God when I don't even know the sequence of what precedes the other in our relationship with God, nor do I know the sequence of what sinks us deeper into the sweetness of fellowshiping with him. I am not sure but I'll take a stand all the same.

There's nothing a man can do without God and as everything in all creation originated from him, so also must our approach towards him start from him. Jesus says it plainly that no one can come to him except the Father draw him. So I believe the first step is that which God takes. Not any work on our part.

After the first step is taken, every other thing must be done and continued in his power and that of his Christ. For Jesus himself also says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5). So all things we do must be done in him and through him.

Now, in respect to the first action done by God by which we come to him, what is that first step? It is that he pulls us to himself. He is ever pulling people to himself. This pull is tender. It is neither strong nor violent, but there's not a man upon the face of the earth that God does not pull. This force that pulls all men to him, like gravity, is far reaching and universal. And there is nowhere in all the universe that a man does not feel that pull. It is written, "And hath made of one blood all nations

of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." (Acts 17:26 - 27). And again it is written of Christ, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9). There is no man born into this world that is not lighted by the light of Christ. This tells us that God has made the whole of creation in such a way that men should seek after him. Commenting on this subject Richard Baxter wrote in his book, "Christian Politics", “To look into nature and not see God, is as to see the creatures, and not the light by which we see them; or to see the trees and houses, and not to see the earth that beareth them.”

The apostle Paul wrote, "Doth not even nature itself teach you..." (1 Corinthians 11:14). This informs us that nature does teach and it teaches a lot of profound truths. The students of nature shall be men and women of great understanding. Take for example, when the student of nature learns at its feet, it will teach him that in all of creation, whatever possesses life will protect it at all cost, whether it is by fleeing with all the strength, fighting with all the might, and doing whatever it takes to retain one's life. This is not just true of humans but of every single living thing. Now, this tells us that abortionists hold their views because they've shunned the lectures of nature. Foetuses, though inactive, provided they have life, would seek to retain it at all cost if they can. It is therefore a great evil done to unborn humans to so wickedly terminate their lives. Also, all the nonsense movements that seek to weaken the family bond and institution present all manner of misleading things in defence of their movements simply because they have failed to learn what nature had to teach. The apostle Paul, learning from nature, said

that it is a shame for a man to have long hair, but it is a woman's glory to have long hair. If it could teach so well on a thing as the length of hair that is appropriate for each gender, it would teach us so much more about gender roles and a world of other things. So nature does teach, and golden are her lessons.

The Bible itself is full of lessons taught by nature as if one were to cite an authority in a particular field of study. Christ taught a lot from nature, talking about plants, seeds, trees, weather, and what have you. Christ though the author of nature did not shun the wisdom and lectures of wisdom nature teaches. He took those wise words of wisdom and used it to give force to his sermons the way citing an authority gives force to an argument. The Psalmists and many writers of the Old Testament taught from what can be learnt from nature. So, nature teaches and teaches profoundly.

This is made clearer where it is written, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:19 - 20). Apostle Paul says here, "being understood by the things that are made." This tells us that nature is capable of teaching about the eternal power of God and even the Godhead. Such knowledge, taught by nature, is really deep and is in no way a casual knowledge. So by the way in which God made creation he presents a message by which he pulls all men to himself. In that it says they are without excuse, it reveals to us that no man can say he does not feel this pull of God. So if nature does proclaim and teach such wondrous things, only they who are dull of hearing can say they can't perceive these things. And if all men can perceive these

things, then by this knowledge they are pulled by God to himself. "... if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." (Acts 17:27).

Acts 17:26-27 informs us that God is evidently seen in all of his creation, and being seen draws us to himself. But the verse then uses these words, "if haply." That is "if they may perchance." If we may perchance feel after and find him. First because he says, "if haply," it means we are not guaranteed of finding him this way, and then it confirms this scepticism when it says, "feel after him." This means we are using about the worst of our five senses. For we have the sense of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. In this verse it is referring to the sense of touch, that with the sense of touch we may feel after God. With the other senses you can tell a lot of things with some level of precision, but you can't tell anything about anything with just the touch alone. You may tell if something is hot or cold, hard or soft, rough or smooth, etc., with the touch, but you can't really tell what it is indeed. You usually still need to rely on your other senses to be able to tell what exactly the thing you're touching is. If you are feeling around in a dark room and touch something hairy, you can't be sure what it is. But when you give the object a hard knock and you hear someone yell, then you know it was someone's head. What came to your aid here is the sense of hearing. But with the other senses it is usually not so. We can know a lot with precision when using the other senses alone.

Also, I heard a story of some people who were blindfolded and using their sense of feelings felt an elephant. One touching it from the side said it is a wall. Another taking hold of the tail said it is a rope. Others said things that were far from what it was. None said it was an elephant. If a man, walking backwards,

bumps into an elephant for example. He may not know what he bumped into, but when he hears the sound of the elephant he could ascertain that it is an elephant he bumped into. And even if the elephant be quiet he could turn round and with the aid of the sight know that it is an elephant. Every man therefore, when it comes to apprehending God, has this sense likened to that of touch by which they can feel around. To this agrees the words, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness..." (Romans 2:14 - 15). This is the knowledge of God in its crudest state and with it men grope along in search of God. If this be the knowledge we have of God we shall not be able to testify with full conviction about him. All we shall say would be mere speculations and assumptions like calling an elephant a rope.

To grope in the dark in search of God is not likely to lead us to him. Therefore, the statement, "if haply..." And it rounds off with this statement, "though he be not far from every one of us." Though we are only able to grope like the blind in darkness after God when we try to find him through creation, we know that if creation were made in such a way as to move us to feel after him, then we are confident that there is no man under the sun that does not feel the pull of God. Yet not one shall find him through this means alone though he be near to all of us.

Why can't man find him? Because of the darkness of the mind. Despite this tender pull of God on all men and the light of Christ that shines on each and every man that has ever stepped into this world, yet men err so greatly far from God and don't come to him. It is written, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto

his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:10 - 11). The world did not know him and his own did not receive him. And moving far from him did all manner of wickedness. Ephesians 4:18-19 says, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." Sin plunges the human mind into darkness, and in such a state of darkness of mind, they are past feeling. Sin deadens the effect of God's tender pull that sinful man may not seek after him.

In 1 Samuel 6:5 the priests of the Philistines advised their elders saying, "Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land." In that they used the word "peradventure" it shows they didn't have a guaranteed means to appease the God they had obviously offended. They merely guessed. They were so close to the chosen people who had all the code by which they were relate with the living God including how to appease him, and though they could feel as when men grope in darkness that what is happening to them was because the living God was offended, yet they had no clue of the exact way to appease him. Though God had mercy on them yet there was nowhere in scriptures that God requested for golden mice and emerods for atonement.

If there be any civilisation that went in search of God by a close study of creation in recorded history it is the Greeks. I was surprised when reading of a Greek philosophy before Christ and how by mere wisdom and observing nature it came so close to an accurate prophecy about Christ. The philosophy is in the book

THE REPUBLIC by Plato. The philosophy presented the human society as a group of people in a dark den and having their backs against the light and unable to turn their heads they can only see the shadows of themselves in the cave. After various discourses and reasonings, as the book was a conversation mostly between two people, they discoursed what would happen if one of them finally got free, faced the light and see the world as it is. They discoursed on the pity he would feel for others still left in the darkness when he had realised that they had a completely distorted view of life. Then the author went on to ask:

"And if there were a contest, and he [the one who had seen the world as it is] had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den... Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death."

Now we have Christ who indeed came into the world from the realms of light who is himself Light, the true Light of the world. Of the magnificence of his light it is written, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9). There's not a soul upon the world that does not feel the brilliance of his light for he "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." But being the Light to save men from darkness what happened to him? They caught him as an offender and put him to death.

The author of the book also wrote, "Then this must be our notion of the just man, that even when he is in poverty or sickness, or any other seeming misfortune, all things will in the

end work together for good to him in life and death" To this agrees our Holy Bible where it says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28). So absolutely inline with the part of Holy Scriptures which was to be revealed.

And again the author said, "Either, then, let us refute this conclusion, or, while it remains unrefuted, let us never say that fever, or any other disease, or the knife put to the throat, or even the cutting up of the whole body into the minutest pieces, can destroy the soul, until she herself is proved to become more unholy or unrighteous in consequence of these things being done to the body; but that the soul, or anything else if not destroyed by an internal evil, can be destroyed by an external one, is not to be affirmed by any man... But the soul which cannot be destroyed by an evil, whether inherent or external, must exist for ever, and if existing for ever, must be immortal?" These agrees to the teachings of our Lord in various places such as, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28), and, "Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." (Matthew 15:17 - 20).

These and more tell us how much of God and his truth can be seen in creation and by the mere study of it man can attain to extremely deep and near divine truths. Truths that were almost

in every way prophetic. Plato sat in the school of nature and o the greatness and depth of the knowledge he got thereby.

Not only were the words of those who by nature sought after the knowledge of God, good, evil, and other answers to the questions of life prophetic as it regards Christ alone. They were prophetic in many other areas. They predicted the systems of governments and how they are corrupted, their evolution, and their pros and their cons, in ways that history has later come to endorse to be indeed the truth in many parts.

By the same reasoning they were able to arrive at other commendable moral, rational, and sometimes near prophetic conclusions. I'm not sure if the book was Plato's account or Socrates' because the main narrator is addressed as Socrates while the book itself is named after Plato. But the book does contain a lot of moral arguments and forbidding of things that were forbidden by God even condemning certain abominations their predecessors held or failed to condemn. These they did not by references to the Mosaic Law, else we could have said they drew such conclusions based on the revelational knowledge of Moses, though it could have been, for at this time the Law had been given a long time and the Jews have been scattered abroad going about with their knowledge of the law, and that particularly to the Greeks. It is written, "The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border." (Joel 3:6). So there must have been close interaction between the Jews and Greeks, but they proved each point they made by logical arguments, not reference to Moses' laws.

The apostle Paul also gave witness to such knowledge in the Gentiles coming by nature and not necessarily by revelation

where he wrote, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another)." (Romans 2:14 - 15). So the Gentiles, the Greeks inclusive and particularly the Greeks, did by nature some things contained in the law and he testified that they did not have the law, which is the revelational knowledge of the will of God. Though with success they discovered, by groping in the reasoning of a darkened mind, some truths about God and his will, yet they missed the mark by an infinitesimal degree. They found few things about God and his will yet invented very many gods and false theories about the living God. Not only was Plato in particular outrageously wrong in aspects regarding divine truths, he was also outrageously wrong and had many wishful thinking pertaining to the things of this world. And being in error in some things pertaining to this world which are observable, shall he and other Greek theologians then have right opinions about the One, True, and Living God? No, their thoughts led them to many gods, but not to the living God.

These gods and endless arguments about their gods reveal an earnestness in their pursuit but despite their earnest efforts to find out God, the things they found were so woefully far from God. For they only followed their thoughts, like blinds, and created a host of gods. To such as them Paul couldn't help saying, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious." (Acts 17:22). And when you read down you'd see how the apostle narrated the earnestness with which they fabricated all manner of objects of worship even having an altar for the "unknown god." Their thoughts led them to make a community of gods that did things that were and are so

shameful for even mortals to engage in. Their gods engaged in adultery and even incest. If one were to try to imagine what gods were like, should he not think of things that exceeded humans in virtue? But not so with their myths. They made foolish notions of their gods which they claimed did despicable things.

Gaia the goddess had 12 children with her own son Uranus. Their children Oceanus, Coeus, Hyperion and Cronus each consorted with one of their sisters and mated with them, producing offspring of their own, while Themis and Mnemosyne became wives of their nephew Zeus, Iapetus married his niece Clymene, and Crius married his half-sister Eurybia. Zeus also fathered a daughter, Persephone, with his other older sister, Demeter. And the list goes on and on. Mind you, these are not real humans but myths. But they define concepts the people had of their gods.

We also see similar disgraceful notions in other civilisations too. Flavius Josephus, in his book "Antiquities of the Jews," narrated how a distinguished Roman woman, Paulina, was lured into the temple of Isis to be carnally known by a man, Decius Mundus, who with the aid of the priests lied to the woman that one of their gods had fallen in love with her and wanted her to come to him in the temple. She felt greatly honoured by this news and even her husband gave her his consent, unknown to them that it was a plot by the man to have an affair with her. When she went to the temple and had eaten, she was taken to a room and the lights put out. This man, who had been hiding in the room, leaped out from his hiding and did what he wanted with her and left. When she returned home, she narrated how the whole thing went to her husband and friends. The people were uncomfortable with her narration and doubted that it was a god

that should know a woman the way she narrated it, but she was convinced that it was the god. But the wicked man, finding the woman somewhere, disclosed to her that he was the one with whom she had affairs with in the temple. The woman was grieved and requested for the help of her husband in seeking justice. It was so grievous in their sight that the emperor asked the priests involved in the matter to be crucified and the man banished. So the Romans could tolerate adultery on the part of gods but not on the part of men. So grieved were they that they crucified men for what they would justify with the gods.

Of the evilness of the activities of the Greek and Roman gods Bishop Aurelius Augustine, when talking of how powerfully pagan gods incite men to wicked actions by giving them the quasi-divine authority of their examples, wrote, "If, then, the deities were veritably fighting with one another, the civil wars of men are sufficiently justified... If, however, it was but a sham-fight, what did they intend by this, but that the civil wars of the Romans should seem no wickedness, but an imitation of the gods? For already the civil wars had begun; and before this, some lamentable battles and execrable massacres had occurred... To disguise the bitterness of such tragedies, and kindle increasing ardour in this monstrous warfare, these malign demons, who were reputed and worshipped as gods, fell upon this plan of revealing themselves in a state of civil war, that no compunction for fellow-citizens might cause the Romans to shrink from such battles, but that the human criminality might be justified by the divine example." So to me, men indeed sought after the living God, but being blinded by the darkness of the mind they were led by the hand to all manner of malign spirits showing themselves to be gods.

With their imaginations the carnal man made gods that engaged

in such shameful acts. If they could be so earnest in their feeling after the things that were made, and could come so close to the truth arriving even to a near prophetic knowledge of the Christ to come by means of that search and still end up in such woeful conclusions, this informs us of how hopelessly impossible it is to find God by feeling after him through things that were made, though they manifest his power most evidently.

But much kudos to the Greeks in particular nonetheless. The Greeks sought God so earnestly in everything that hinted towards him. Even when they heard about Christ they came in search of him too. It is written, "And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus." (John 12:20 - 21). What I can't say however is whether or not Christ gave them any attention, but that their quest for God led them to Christ is not to be doubted. The first Christians largely comprised of Greeks, though they probably had less reasons to be in Israel in numbers. Judea was a colony of Rome so it was understandable to see Romans in their numbers in Judea. Yet we didn't hear much of Romans being among the first Christians. When there was a complaint of discrimination of daily ration, the complaint was that the Greeks were discriminated against (Acts 6:1-8). All the people chosen whom the apostles prayed for and laid their hands upon were all Greeks. Stephen (the protomartyr) being one of them was a Greek. The only non-Jewish author of the books of the Bible was Luke, a Greek, an author of two books of the Bible. As though to give the Greeks a medal of honour in the man Luke to acknowledge the earnestness with which they sought after the Creator in the close study of nature and searches for answers. The Jews were called of God, but the Greeks of whom we have no hint that at any time in history

were called of God went after him. To number among the Jewish authors in the writing of scriptures seems to me to be an exceedingly great honour bestowed of God on the Greek nation.

Away from the Greeks, according to A.W. Tozer, in a sermon series titled "Voices That Intreat Us," he says the voices that intreat us are, the voice of God's love, the voice of the Holy Spirit, the voice of reason, the voice of conscience, the voice of God's judgment, the voice of the lost, the voice of the soul, the voice of Jesus' blood, and the voice of the saved. These sermons are available on the Internet for free to download and I recommend them to you. These are a whole lot of voices and can one say in the midst of these constant speaking voices, or even thundering voices, he does not feel God drawing him and intreating him to come to his God? I doubt.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine also wrote, "The law says: "Thou shall not covet." Faith says: "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." Grace says: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Health says: "O Lord my God, I cried unto Thee, and Thou hast healed me." Free will says: "I will freely sacrifice unto Thee." Love of righteousness says: "Transgressors told me pleasant tales, but not according to Thy law, O Lord." So at every stage of life and progress there are ever voices that intreat us towards God and his ways. All these voices are all ordained of God. The voices by which God intreats us are many so that there's not a man under the sun that can say he didn't hear them.

There is however a special pull with which God pulls a man. And this pull is to his Son through the Gospel. In the Law and written word we have the excellency of the knowledge of God. For through it we come out of darkness into his marvellous light

and see things more clearly. It is for this reason that it is written, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." (Psalm 119:130). We can testify boldly of God having seen with our eyes those things that are written. However, those things that are written are not for mere seeing but to guide us to him as Christ said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39). Until we have followed those things that are written into a more perfect knowledge of him and intimacy with him, we shall not be able to know him fully well. For if in reading we don't follow what we read, it still creates this abstract representation of God in our hearts. God still seems like an abstract theory to our intellect.

As said, looking at creation to try to find God is like groping in the dark like a blind person. As we have seen, many (both Greeks and non-Greeks) have groped in this darkness and have resorted to all forms of idol worship thinking the idols are gods. They didn't quite find God. But Jesus says, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12). Now in Christ we need not grope like the blind. He that followeth him shall not walk in darkness. So the glorious call of the Gospel to come to Jesus is the firmest pull of God.

As we have seen, the peoples who sought after God couldn't find him because the way by which they sought him was not the way ordained by God by which man may find him. They sought him earnestly, yet they missed the mark entirely as when a footballer plays a penalty over the throwing line. It is written, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21). Rather, in seeking God their blind

hearts led them to dumb idols. But in the glorious light of Christ, not only do we see the way to him but he himself draws us to himself in that light. He says, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32). There's not a man that Christ does not pull to himself, and this is especially through the Gospel. The gospel is God's ordained way for men to find him. Every other thing can pull and do draw men to seek him, but only in the Gospel do they find him.

So glorious is that light that we can't but find God and walk with him in firm and sure steps. Back to the story of the Philistines in 1 Samuel 6:5 where it says, "Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land." We walk with God no longer saying peradventure, or perchance, or probably as the heathen do. Such terms are no more required in our walk with God. In the light of Christ we walk with him with sure, firm, and assured steps.

Isaac Watts also wrote a hymn with a verse that goes:

"... All nature joins to show Thy praise:
Thus God in every creature shines;
Fair is the book of nature's lines,
But fairer is Thy book of grace."

Though the whole of creation, like a book, reveals the wondrous power of God and testify of his majesty, perfection, care, etc. and thus his being, yet Isaac Watts says, "fairer is Thy book of grace." By this he refers to the Bible. The Bible proclaims the gospel of Christ. Both Old and New Testament.

Dr. Selwyn Hughes once wrote about what it takes to become a Christian. He used the verses that reads, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Romans 10:13 - 15). He explained that this informs us that there are five steps to becoming Christians taking these steps from these verses in a reverse order. They are as follows,

1. A preacher must be sent
2. He must preach about the Lord to a man
3. A man must hear that which is preached
4. A man must believe in the name of the Lord
5. He must call on the name of the Lord

At any time a person hears the gospel of our Lord he is already three fifths of the way to being saved. A preacher has been sent by God. The preacher has done the work of a preacher and spoken about Christ. At the point in which he hears the Gospel he's at step 3. All that is left for him is to believe the name of the Lord and to call upon his name. Just two steps. So God, in this glorious pull has done most of the work for a man to be saved. Indeed he's done all the work. In number it is three fifths, in laboriousness it is all the work.

So, we needn't grope in darkness anymore. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12). Thanks be to God that he didn't send just a lamp or a candle. That would have been of great help though. But he sent the very Sun of

righteousness (Malachi 4:2). What light can be bright as the Sun? So man needn't grope in darkness anymore but can come to God as a man walks freely in the noonday sun.

However, not all that is drawn come to Christ. Not all take these two last steps. The apostle Paul also said it, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?" (Romans 10:16). God has sent people into all the world to call men unto him. They have gone. They have preached the gospel. But who has believed our report?

Apart from this, of those that do come to Christ, not all have a successful walk with him. Some shipwreck their faith. There is a particular sect that believes that once a person is saved, then heaven is guaranteed for him or her. To them there is no way such a person could lose his or her salvation. But it is written, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." (1 Timothy 1:19). So it is possible to still lose one's salvation despite being drawn of God and even responding to that call to come to Jesus Christ. Of all these we can't say they had a successful walk with God.

I know that many get saved upon being preached to, others may have been saved when they got to know about the joys of heaven, A.W. Tozer got saved when he was passing by and heard a preacher say, "if you want to be saved, call upon the name of the Lord." When he got home he went on his knees, called upon the name of the Lord and got saved that instance. Bishop Aurelius Augustin got saved when he read from the book of Romans some time after going to listen to a sermon by Bishop Ambrose of Milan. I heard a story of a man who had an accident, fell into a coma, and it was during this time he saw revelations that caused him to become a Christian when he

gained consciousness. Paul got converted when he saw the revelation of Christ and experienced the manifestation of his power, in that he was made blind by the brilliancy of his glory, and through prayer in his name was his sight restored. I got saved when I saw my late dad on his knees praying and the thought came to me to pray too, though a number of things preceded this. But these experiences had others and yet they are still not saved. Many probably heard the preacher who Tozer heard speak but did not get saved. Tozer was just passing by, but I believe there would have been some in actual attendance of the program in which the preacher was preaching and left there unsaved. There were many who listened to Ambrose of Milan who probably did not get saved like Augustine. And many sighted my dad praying, for we were in church, but not even the thought of even praying crossed their minds. Many people have been involved in ghastly motor accidents and are still not saved. Others have been in coma for a number of reasons but are still not saved. The very thought of death does not move them to come to Christ. So being preached to, or knowing about hell, or the joys of heaven still didn't grant such a person a walk with God, not to mention a successful one. While these has led some to Jesus, our Passover lamb, to begin that heavenward journey, others were just indifferent to it.

Herein was my confusion. For here I wish to speak on our successful walk with God, and though every man under the sun feels this pull, not all get saved. So though all things start from God, what is that first step by which we have a successful walk with him? The preceding cause of our coming to God is his drawing us to himself in the person of his Son. But not all come to him, and not all that come to him stay till the end, his pull not meeting the necessary actions from those that are pulled. Therefore the preceding cause of all walks with God is his pull

on all mankind, but there is something that precedes all successful walk with God and is missing in all failed walk with him, or not even coming to him in the first place. Let's proceed together to find out by what means we could have that successful walk with him.

Before I bring this chapter to a close, I'd like to ask few questions. In what ways have you felt the pull of God? How have you responded? Is there a way you've responded that deters you from coming to Christ? What do you require to be done to you for you to come to him? Give honest answers to this and let's proceed.

Prayer: Dear Father of all mankind, you who pull all men to yourself to seek you, instructed nature to teach, and provided in your Son the glorious light by which we may all come home. Grant us the grace not to be indifferent to your pull, but like your disciples, may we without a word rise up and follow you. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

CHAPTER 8: MAKING PEACE WITH GOD

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."
(2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

Now, why do some people not come to God? Because they are unknowingly at war with God their Maker. There are states we find ourselves that we are not conscious of. Jesus says, "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:20 - 21). They may not be conscious of the fact that is responsible for their failure to come to the light of Christ, but deep down is that hatred for the light, for they know that in the light they shall be reproved. So that hatred for the Light, which is Christ, keeps them far away.

Also, when Christ was before Pilate, it is written, "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." (John 18:37). As many as is of the truth come to Christ. But they that are of the Devil, the father of lies, can't come to him.

People sometimes find themselves in enmity with God due to some diabolical practices they are involved in, indoctrination to some false religion, living a bad lifestyle that one knows would be reproved should he come to the light. All these and more make people fail to come to the light of Christ.

From the fall of man, mankind in general has been in enmity with God, for with that fall came sin into the world. And sin has at its root the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, and these things we are told are of the world (John 2:16), and so against God. So everyone born into this world by nature finds himself at variance with God, for God is against these things of the world which men by nature lust after.

There is an existing enmity with God which many are unconscious of. To be able to come to God we need to make peace with him.

Has God Offended You?

"When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."
(John 6:61, 66)

"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."
(Matthew 11:6)

Here I wish to appeal to each and every reader to examine their

hearts. What exactly do you have against God? How has God offended you? I know it is a good question and probably more important to consistently ask ourselves if or not we've offended God and how we've offended him. But we need to flip the coin around and ask if God has offended us. I know the question may sound foolish if not irreverent and blasphemous because offence is something that is often associated with wrong doing. That is like asking has God offended me by lying to me, stealing my goods, done wickedly, or dealt unfairly with me. So when we ask this question it sounds like an irreverent question to ask. However, while offence is mostly associated with wrong doings, it is not all the time that offence comes by wrong doing alone.

There are times you may have done things you're unaware of, things that are not wrong doings in themselves, but someone somewhere gets offended. You may just be walking by someone who is sitting around, and because you didn't salute them he gets offended. It is not your duty to say hello, neither did he pay you to say hello, but he gets offended for something you never meant for an offence. Life is full of strife and your mere existence is an offence to some. At other times it could be for actual good things that you do that makes people get offended. If you see someone in need for example and you give them money, they could get offended and say you just wish to show that you're wealthy.

Now those are just some instances of our natural life. If we in such a state get offended at even good things, how much more easy it is for spiritual things. I know people in our fallen world get so easily offended at almost every good spiritual thing we do. I remember preaching to an unbeliever on the need to be saved, while he himself did not respond in a way that showed he was offended, it was a person who was supposedly a

Christian that withstood me angrily asking me why would I be preaching to an unbeliever, and that believers should keep their opinions to themselves while unbelievers keep theirs to themselves too. He withstood me completely that I couldn't share my faith with this unbeliever. Preaching on how to be saved was a very good thing. Why should anyone be damned? But even this offended someone. When I published one of my past books and posted it on Facebook, I also got foolish comments from people who were obviously offended. The books were aimed at correcting issues that bother around the Christian life, church and family, so that we can live better, holier, and happier in God's blessings, but so many came with ridiculous comments aimed at mocking the work and making it look irrelevant. These were people who were obviously furious at things that are good.

Those are instances of people being angry at good things that others did. I hear someone say, well it is possible to be offended at the good of others, but what fool can be offended at God? I have heard people who went through bitter times in life which led them to be angry with God and even deny him. For example, I've heard of something like people who were committed to the service of God and when their only child gets sick, they pray hard for a long time pleading with God to save the child, but the child still dies. Then they conclude that if God would allow them to suffer such a loss despite their committed service to him and pleading with him, it means there is no God. Such people had let the pride of their heart make them think that in their service to God they're doing him such a big favour. And since God in his wisdom still let them suffer, they forsook God. If I were God and some poor creature thinks I owe him something for his seeming service to warrant my answering, I think I wouldn't even bother answering him. He may appear to have lost his faith, but he never had one before.

Even holy men of the Bible days were offended at God, on account of him, or offended at obviously good things. David was displeased with God's action on account of the death of Uzzah. It is written, "And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day." (2 Samuel 6:6 - 8). On this account David refused to take the ark into his city until later.

About the most classic example of a righteous man being grieved at God was Asaph, the psalmist that wrote Psalm 73. The cause of his own offence was that he observed how prosperous the wicked and godless are. The thought of this thing so grieved him that he said to God, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." (Psalm 73:13). In other words, he's saying his service to God and living for God was totally in vain. Meaning it was a foolish choice to make. He then later acknowledged, "Thus my heart was grieved..." (Psalm 73:21). You can read the cause of grief in Psalm 73.

Asa, the king of Judah, was literally angry with God in 2 Chronicles 16 so much that he persecuted people and resolved never to consult God in times of his need. His anger with God was with so much resolve just the way people do when they keep malice with one another and secretly resolve never to have anything to do with them. He was a righteous man and did so much in the fear and name of God (2 Chronicles 21:12). But he was still judged for a seemingly light fault of relying on the tact

of diplomacy rather than trusting in God. When you weigh the acts of Asa, it was a brilliant manoeuvre. The idea was to send gifts to Syria so as to get help from the king of Israel who had laid a siege on Judah. Upon getting the gift Syria attacked Israel forcing the king of Israel to withdraw. In the haste of withdrawal they had left a lot of goodies which Asa then took to rebuild Ramah. I'm not sure the amount of what he got from the things the king of Israel left behind amounted to the gifts he sent to Damascus, but he at least got enough to build a city which he had built before. Such a smart move ought to have been applauded but he was charged with outright folly for taking such steps instead of relying on the power of God. He probably had perceived himself to be a genius, and to be so charged was more than he could stomach. That action got him so angry with everybody including God. He never consulted God again till his dying day. The anger that could follow a man to the grave was no small anger. God indeed offended him.

So the very righteous get angry at God. Lest we think he was a sinner whose ways are averse to God and therefore naturally turns the sinner against God, it is written, "And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah." (2 Chronicles 21:12). In spite of his anger, his ways were so righteous that even after his death, to generations after, he remained a role model of righteousness to have been mentioned by the holy prophet Elijah. His righteousness is not to be doubted yet he was furious at God.

Naaman was angry when Elisha asked him to go and wash in Jordan and be healed of his leprosy. He was angry and went away had not his servant reasoned with him to obey the prophet

of God (2 Kings 5). The prophet had told him the right thing to be done to cure him from his disease. This was good and to his best interest. This was, as a matter of fact, a privilege, but he walked away from it in anger. The prescription of the prophet, the mouthpiece of God, was offensive to him.

These were men of the Old Testament but the New Testament has its own special degree of offence. The New Testament starts with the person of Christ and from him originates the greatest of offence to both the good, the bad, and the outrageously ugly. As we have seen in the Old Testament that God's actions do offend even the righteous, we must understand that Christ in particular is set for offence. One of his purposes for coming to this planet was to offend. It was prophesied about him, "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." (Isaiah 8:14). Jesus is a rock of offence, a gin and a snare, but particularly a rock offence. He came with a sword (Matthew 10:34). Not ice creams.

When you study the life of Christ, you'd perceive that he designed his words to offend. His mode of conversation was ruthless. He called people fools, hypocrites, serpents, vipers, and all. Weren't there nicer words than those? The people he used these on were of course deserving of such names and he was just to have called them so, but he was ruthless. And his ruthlessness offended a great many.

Jesus did many great and good things but even his good works angered the Jews and incurred the most bitter hate. It is written, "And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him." (Luke 19:47). His good actions offended these people. For the good

action of teaching they were offended even to the point of plotting his death.

Such a great level of offence was common throughout his ministry in different locations and different people. They get so angry they want to kill him. It is written, "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way." (Luke 4:28 - 30). In this circumstance they actually wanted to kill him miserably. It is one thing to sleet a man's throat, but to be so angry that you want to throw a man off a cliff headlong is another thing.

Not only did his ways offend his adversaries, many of his very own disciples were offended at him so much that they stopped walking with him. It is written, "Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?... From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:61, 66). He perceived the offence and that is why he asked, "Doth this offend you?" (John 6:61). For this reason many of his disciples stopped walking with him. The same way people get offended at God for one reason or the other and stop walking with him despite the fact that they've been walking with him before, like Asa. The same way even people that have never drawn close to him, from afar they sight things that offend them and refuse to come to God. Even the twelve were offended but here is why they remained, "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68). They were offended but they knew that the words

of eternal life can be found in no other, so they remained.

Jesus did not apologise to any of those he offended. His cool response to his disciples when they were angry was, "Doth this offend you?" (John 6:61). The offence was deliberate and he achieved his purpose through the offence when they all left him. He didn't like the idea of people following him about for bread. I too will be pissed off if I know that the essence of my coming down from above was to preach the kingdom, this preaching required that I go from place to place to preach to those who haven't heard it before, but there were this bunch of people who follow me from place to place, not to hear the word of the eternal life but to eat bread. So he deliberately preached the truth in a very offensive way and coupled with the fact that they didn't get the bread they sought for, they all left. Job done.

You know offending people is fun stuff. In my article **JESTING, MOCKERY, HUMOUR, AND SOBRIETY**, I said that if someone thinks he's funny and his funniness hasn't gotten him into trouble, he isn't funny. Why, because offending people is fun stuff. It is particularly funner when the offended party can't do anything about it and against you. So you just amuse yourself with their fumings. And though Christ may not derive fun in offending people, he is the stumbling block. He sometimes achieves his purposes through offence.

Even his own forerunner, John the Baptist, was apparently offended in him. It is written, "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matthew 11:2 - 3). John appeared to be offended here. That statement "do we look for another" could only come from a point of irritation and offence. We can't tell what was

going on in the mind of John the baptist, but when we read that it was from prison that he sent his disciples to Jesus, we can have a clue as to what could be going on in his mind. He probably was expecting deliverance from Christ. How could you be the Almighty and watch your friend rot in prison? John was obviously not an ordinary man and had experienced the divine and heavenly world before coming back to this world. For Christ said he was the Elijah which was to come (Matthew 11:14). Elijah had been taken up in a chariot of fire to heavenly realms. After several hundreds of years, John was born in the same spirit of Elijah. That he had experienced the heavenly world and was specifically sent in person by God is not to be doubted for he said, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." (John 1:32 - 33). And when we perceive the experiences of this man, we can easily see why Christ said of him, "For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." (Luke 7:28).

So if mere men could misunderstand the ways and goodness of God and therefore be offended, I suppose a man like John ought to have known him well enough not to have misunderstood him. And so, it was probably not out of place to have expected deliverance from no less a person than Christ himself, the only potentate. But John got no deliverance until he was beheaded. I wonder what thoughts must have gone through the mind of John as he watched his executors approach him to take off his head. While in the person of Elijah, a Jezebel had threatened to take off his head. He fled, fell into depression, despaired of his life, wished he would die, went to heaven, and came back to earth,

only to have a daughter of Jezebel carry out the threat of the first Jezebel. It was tragic and Christ looked on. And I suppose a man must have been grieved at the supposed cold indifference of a friend.

Christ perceived the offence in the message he sent from prison and did not offer any consolatory message except to say at the concluding part of his response to John the baptist, "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." (Matthew 11:6). He perceived the offence and admonished John the Baptist that he shouldn't be offended in him. The ways of Christ are mysterious and he himself knows and is fully aware that his ways offend people. Yet being aware his responses are sometimes cold and far from what we should expect from the compassionate Christ that he was. And still yet his ways are right and good and pure, that is why he never gives a consolatory message to those who are offended in him. We may see it as being cold not to console those who have been offended by his actions by some kind of apology or compassionate word, but those are necessary only when you've done things in error. But I suppose because his ways are good and perfect, he needn't say anything conciliatory.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." (1 Corinthians 4:9). That at best was not a happy declaration made with glee. The apostle was not happy about that reality. He felt God had made the apostles the least of men. This he said because of all the sufferings they endured.

This tells us that being offended by God is a common thing and that there're times when the only way to remain with God is to

have no other option but him. They who have options besides God may not tarry long with him. But they who all the while they have been walking with God, or even yet to come to him, have an alternative to following God easily get offended at him and refuse to walk with him. To the apostles who remained with Christ, they had nowhere else to go and they knew that the thing they wanted, the words of eternal life, was to be found in Christ alone. They too must have found it hard to accept Jesus' saying, but they wouldn't leave on that account.

You yourself may have been hit by the offences of his mysterious ways. It is natural. It offended John the Baptist too, a man who Christ praised of being the greatest prophet, nay indeed the greatest person to have been born of a woman. Don't pretend like your life and experiences and the course of the world and humans in general, which things he controls, are all things that are the way you would wish and have them to be. I have been offended myself in time past. One thing that confuses me is the fact that the Almighty asks his own to wait on him. If we are his and going through so much unpleasantness, why should his admonition to us be wait? If he's Almighty, why not by his majestic decrees make everything good at all times? But as his word declares, he only makes all things good in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). So his own must wait through whatever unpleasantness they go through.

I'm currently confused about certain things in my life which occasionally lead me to being offended, but experience has taught me that if I know of certainty that he is good and loving and kind, I should surrender to his purpose. Not that I understand his dealings with me to the extent that I can define its every outline to be marks of goodness, but knowing he's good, I'm convinced that it is my ignorance that makes me not

to see his goodness clearly in all he does. While it may be mysterious, time shall reveal the goodness and kindness behind it all.

We see that God and his ways do offend people to a very great extent. This includes the righteous. And all we have looked at so far are the righteous being offended in God, but what about the carnal man? His own offences abound. His very nature is at war with God. It's hostile to him so much that should he be able to lay a hand on his God, he would crucify him on a cross, bury him and seal his grave with a stone to ensure that he never rises again. The death of Christ on the cross in the hands of men reveals to us the disposition of the carnal man towards his God.

It is good to point out right early that this does not encourage us to murmur against God. The Bible clearly says, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." (1 Corinthians 10:10). The difference between the murmuring and the other seeming murmuring is where they originate from. One originate from a point of lust, the other originate from a point of love. It is written, "These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts..." (Jude 1:16). The one is being grieved and complaining because one's lust wasn't gratified, the other was grieved because of some misconception he held while they were in the loving service of God. The psalmist in Psalm 73 complained, but it was because he loved God so much and was grieved on this account. So we must learn to be honest about our feelings about God and present to him our displeasures without murmuring the murmurs of lust, ingratitude, and insolence.

So, if anything about God offends you, that's good and fine, but what do you do about it? "And blessed is he, whosoever shall

not be offended in me." (Matthew 11:6).

How is your relationship with your God? How has God offended you? Don't hide your resentment against God. Acknowledging them is a major step to having a successful walk with him, for this is sincerity. It is written, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that... speaketh the truth in his heart (Psalm 15:1 - 2). He that does not speak the truth in his heart about his feelings towards God is insincere and will thus not abide in his tabernacle and holy hill. Think carefully on these questions, give them an answer, confess them to God, then let's proceed.

God's Offer Of Reconciliation

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."
(2 Corinthians 5:19)

Now we need to know that God is a God of peace. The Bible calls him so countlessly. Read Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Hebrews 13:20. A host of other verses signify this also. And being a God of peace he's ever willing to reconcile with us. Even before man fell, being a God of peace, he already made a means of reconciliation to man. It is written, "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Revelation

13:8). Jesus Christ was slain from the foundation of the world for the purpose of our reconciliation. So God is ever willing to be reconciled to you no matter how offended you are at him. He has in fact already paved a path of reconciliation before you got offended.

It is written, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken... Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD..." (Isaiah 1:2, 18). From this passage we understand that God is seeking to reason with us, and what is the purpose of reasoning together if not to find grounds of agreement and amend the ways that are not in agreement? Surely God seeks that we should agree with him. He wants us to make his priorities our priorities, he wants us to have desires that are in consonance with his. He wants us to be in every way, be it thought, words, and conducts, like him. To walk with God, we must be agreed with him. To be agreed with him is to fashion our lives after his own pattern. His pattern is that which is revealed in his word. His word is that which we have, The Holy Bible.

When he says, "come let us reason together," it means that the path to reconciliation involves serious soul searching. Bringing things together and pondering on our ways and expectations and pitting them against his word to see where the problems are. This way we shall realise a lot of things. For example, according to Dr. Selwyn Hughes of blessed memories, much of the reasons why many Christians have resentments against God is because they try to hold him to promises he never made. If we but settle down and think things over in careful consideration of his word we shall find therein the answers to the things that cause resentments against God, and in the revelation of his word we shall say with the psalmist, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I

was as a beast before thee." (Psalm 73:22), and conclude, "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works." (Psalm 73:28).

Secondly, in the fact that God also says in his invite, "... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18), it reveals that the major problem that separates people from their God is sin. We have talked about the fact that even the righteous can be offended at the ways of God, but the righteous don't get separated on that account. Sin separates man for his God and part of the invite is that those sins would be washed away. For without their washing away there can be no reconciliation with God.

In his offer of peace God offers to take everything out of the way. He will reason with us to solve all discrepancies in our reasoning that made us offended in him, and he will remove sin completely away from us. This way he did the work to the uttermost that nothing can stand in between us and himself. He is indeed the God of peace.

The Bible tells us "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23). God is here described as the God of peace, making us to understand that he is ever willing to draw us to himself to agree with him so that we can walk with him. God wants to walk with us. The question is, are we willing to walk with him? If yes, then we can be sure that his residing presence will be ours.

God recognises the fact that men are offended in him, not

because of his wrongdoing, but because of man's fallen nature and ignorance. It is written, "When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?" (John 6:61). As he was aware of those whose offence was food related so is he aware of all other offences with which we are offended at him. Yet what this is supposed to make him do is to destroy man entirely and immediately. Why? Because first, we are fallen and have sinned from the beginning in Adam. That alone is worthy of destruction. And now we are picking offence with his actions for our own wrong doings. Yet in his magnanimity he, who is the Almighty, is still reaching out to us, who are but mere dust and ashes, and seeking to reconcile us to himself. He who reaches the arm of peace and reconciliation in a dispute of any form or degree is esteemed the weak party. This is usually the case. In a war, it is usually the losing party that pursues terms of peace. But God does not bother about these and still reaches out to us, offering us reconciliation to himself. This he does not do just in a casual way but in an earnest endeavour.

It is written, "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19). Read more in Romans 5:10, Romans 11:15, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Ephesians 2:16, Colossians 1:20-21, Hebrews 2:17, to mention but few. The whole gospel that has been committed to each and every living Christian by what is called "the great commission" is a commission of reconciliation to God. He has sent out men in large numbers for all ages to go out and seek to reconcile men to him. Everything about salvation, including the death of Christ on the cross was done to reconcile man to himself. What an earnest endeavour this all is.

In all our Christian walk with God, we must hold this truth that

we are walking with the God of peace. We sometimes see God as that being who's ever prepared to break our heads with a big stick at the slightest sin. We hold many other untrue notions about God. We must reccaliberate our view of God to ensure we understand him fully and rightly. There are many things that characterise God which we must hold him as, one of them is that he is the God of peace. A.B. Simpson wrote, "Justification, and a justification so thoroughly accepted as to banish all doubt and fear and make God to us "the very God of peace," is indispensable to any real or abiding experience of sanctification."

What shall we then do? What are we then waiting for? Let us, this very day accept his terms of peace. Let us accept his outstretched arms and go into his warm embrace. Let us be at peace with our God.

Come To God

"... him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."
(John 6:37)

Are you at peace with God? Can you spend a moment to consider your life and your doings and consider if indeed you're at peace with your Maker? Do you know his will? Does his will offend you? Does his will negate your will and inclinations? If so, are you willing to make amends to your will to align with his will? If you're not willing, why? What has he done to offend you so much that you won't be willing to make amends and be at peace with your God?

Though you may not realise this, if you don't find yourself first of all keen to know his will, and secondly at every point you know his will you seek to align your will to his, then you're offended at him and he's an offence to you. This is a major sign by which you measure your allegiance to God. And if this is the case, he's reaching out to you to come to him. Examine yourself and give honest answers to these things. The Almighty is asking that you be reconciled to him. And I join the voices of all the saints down the years to plead with you. Come to the Lord your God. If you've been with God before and left him, amend your ways and come back to him.

It is written in John 3:21, which we've looked at earlier, "But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Truth is what Jesus says that those who come to him do. Part of this truth is that plain truthful acceptance of one's sinful state and the truthful acceptance of Jesus as the only way to redeem our souls, is what will make us acceptable before Christ, then he will grant us his righteousness. Away from God and his blessed light you won't get reproved. But if you come to the light you have no choice than to be reproved. If despite knowing this you still come to God, he will wrought good works in you that you no longer fear the gospel or its rebuke. You shall be free indeed. But they who stay away from his blessed light would avoid reprove as long as they live, but the moment they die comes damnation without remedy.

What this tells us is that sin is what separates us from God. Richard Baxter wrote in his book, "The Saint's Everlasting Rest," “He hath drawn the curtain between us and him: We are far from him as creatures, and farther as frail mortals, and farthest as sinners.” This informs us that nothing separates us from God

as much as sin. So we must strive to get rid of sin by all means. Our whole life must be spent in the relentless war and watching against sin. For as we have said, sin is the major thing (if not the only thing) that separates us from God.

Finally, as A.W. Tozer points out, if you must come to God, you must have this full consciousness that all the changes have to come from you and not him. He says, "I am the LORD, I change not." (Malachi 3:6). There are people who wish to bring God to their own terms, make him accept it, and then they can come to him. They don't want to change many aspects of their own lives. But that doesn't work. If you must come to God all the changes have to come from you and the changes have to bring about an absolute conformity to his will.

Usually the standard of peace is that both sides make concessions. You both compromise and alter your initial wills so as to meet at a new middle point where peace can ensue. Granted, this is the way of obtaining peace in the world, but this is not the way of obtaining peace with God. He that will come to him must come with the conviction that he is the LORD, he changeth not.

So, it is good to examine yourself and see if there is anything in you that keeps you back from coming to God. Remember that these things are not things that are obvious. These things are there within the hearts of many, keeping them back from God, yet they're so unaware of them. If we must find out if there is anything keeping us back from God, we must carefully examine our thoughts, our inward motions, our forwardness or reluctance to come to God, the cause of these things, etc.

Has God offended you? Do you have anything against him? How

forward are you to hear about God and the things he desires from you? If you don't find this earnest desire to know all (with increasing degrees) about what he desires from you, and when you know it desire to obey him, then there is something holding you back. Do you read your Bible as often as possible? Do you pray at almost every given time? If you don't relate with him this way, then surely there's something holding you back. Surely, there's something that offends you about God.

So come to God in sincerity and prayer. Acknowledge it and come to God in reverential prayer ready to make amends everywhere you find the need to. Acknowledging our displeasures and coming to him for reconciliation is the way of reconciliation which is well pleasing to God. If the displeasure we feel towards God pertains to unanswered prayers, I'd strongly recommend my article titled "THE LIMITS OF PRAYERS AND THE INFINITY OF GOD." I could estimate unanswered prayers to be 90% of the reasons why Christians are displeased with God. In that article I sought to address that issue. So let's go to God in reverential prayers, admitting our displeasures and resentment, confess our sins, and seek to be reconciled to him.

I'd like to end this chapter with the hymn, "Though Your Sins Be As Scarlet" by Fanny Crosby:

"Though your sins be as scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though your sins be as scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they be red as crimson,
They shall be as wool;"
"Though your sins be as scarlet,
Though your sins be as scarlet,

They shall be as white as snow,
They shall be as white as snow.

Hear the voice that entreats you,
O return ye unto God!
Hear the voice that entreats you,
O return ye unto God!
He is of great compassion,
And of wondrous love;
Hear the voice that entreats you,
Hear the voice that entreats you,
O return ye unto God!
O return ye unto God!

He'll forgive your transgressions,
And remember them no more;
He'll forgive your transgressions,
And remember them no more;
"Look unto Me, ye people,"
Saith the Lord your God!
He'll forgive your transgressions,
He'll forgive your transgressions,
And remember them no more,
And remember them no more."

Prayer: Dear Father, you who sent your Son and a host of men in every age to reconcile the world including myself to you, help me to be reconciled to you. Let not my will and stubborn heart frustrate such earnest endeavour from no less an one than your eternal majesty. Help me to have all the confusions of my heart resolved, and where they can't be resolved for the limitations of my understanding, help me to surrender wholly to you. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 9: THE JOYFUL ESPOUSAL OF THE SOUL

"With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."
(Isaiah 26:9)

As we have said, Tozer listed a number of voices that intreat us and he said that one of the voices is the voice of the soul. The soul has an innate yearning for God. And there is this joy that pervades the soul when it is united with God and at peace with him. This joy is what reconciliation brings to us. There is no fitter joy to describe this than the joy of espousal. It is written, "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." (Song of Solomon 3:11). The day of one's espousal is a day of the gladness of one's heart above most other days. There's this indescribable joy that pervades the soul when one meets the one for whom they're meant.

Indeed in many cases we can see that our relationship with God is depicted by marriage. It is written, "Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments,

and to hearken unto his voice: And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments (Deuteronomy 26:17 - 18). Just like intending couples take matrimonial vow, so do we take a vow (not by swearing or oath taking though) to be the Lord's and he ours.

After saying a lot about married couples, the apostle Paul wrote, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31 - 32). In the book of Revelations, the church is portrayed as the bride and Christ the groom. And on and on like that. We do have verses that speak on the relationship of God and his people to be a form of marriage. Nothing better to define such a sweetly beautiful union than marriage.

The soul is meant for God, and there is this indescribable joy when it meets her God. As the day of the gladness of a man is the day of his espousal, the day of the gladness of the soul is the day it meets its God. The day it is reconciled with him by whom and for whom it was made. There is no joy of the soul above this.

John Wesley wrote, "while he [Someone reading from the book of Romans at a Christian gathering] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." To be reconciled to God brings peace and joy to the soul much more than when one is united with his or her spouse.

Here is a story I read of Thomas Ross on hymntime.com:

"Thomas Ross was brought up a Roman Catholic; but on his coming of age, he read the Scriptures for himself, saw the errors of his past life, began to attend the ministry of the Methodists in 1797, and was admitted a member of Society by the Rev. Samuel Bradburn. He was for some years a steward, trustee, and class leader, and faithfully served in each office. His last illness was short, but his mind enjoyed much peace. The night before his departure he repeated his favourite hymn which spoke the language of his heart:

"Happy the souls to Jesus joined,
And saved by grace alone,"

In this delightful frame, his spirit returned to God who gave it, 6th February 1847, aged seventy years."

Indeed, happiness is the soul that is joined to its Maker and Lord."

It is written, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jeremiah 2:2). No matter how far we go from God the soul is ever yearning for its Maker. And shall ever seek to be reconciled to God. The only problem is that the soul is the most despised and neglected aspect of human life and existence. If we could have paid a little more attention to the soul as we do the body, then we could have experienced more of God. We would perceive the yearning of the soul and it shall lead us to God. Alas, the lust of the eye,

the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life blinds us from perceiving this tender yearning of our souls.

But when we've been reconciled to God, our souls shall experience the wondrous joy of its espousal to God. Here shall our love life with God begin. Here shall start the most beautiful and pure love life that could ever exist under the son. Oh the wonder of the joyful espousal of the soul.

Prayer: Dear God and Lover of our souls, teach us to be conscious of the yearnings of our souls, and may the yearning of it guide us to you, make us remain with you, and be joined to you. May we experience this blissful joy of walking with you and being with you all our days. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 10: LOVING GOD

"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."
(Deuteronomy 6:5)

Being reconciled with God we naturally begin to love him for indeed love is the mark of reconciliation. It is written, "But if any man love God, the same is known of him." (1 Corinthians 8:3). So when we begin to love God, we are known to him. That is he recognises, acknowledges, and accepts that love. Herein is reconciliation made perfect. And this love is key to everything about our relationship with God. As we have seen that not many people do come to Christ, despite God's pull on every human. And of those that do come, not many of them still have a successful walk with him. But there is one thing that is common to all those who have a successful walk with God, and that one thing is love. Love for God. You may be called by all the voices, spoken to by all those sent, had a life of turbulent experiences, and what have you. All these don't result in a successful walk with God. Whatever those voices, messengers, or experiences are, they must bring you to this point of loving God before they can translate into a successful walk with him. A successful walk with God all starts here. If they don't bring you to this one point of loving God, whatever they are, they can't result in a successful walk with him.

Jesus makes us understand that on this commandment of loving

God, and the other of loving our neighbour, hang all the law and the prophets, meaning that all the law and the prophets rely on these. In particular, since the focus is walking with God and not so much on walking with our neighbour, I will be focusing on loving God and the aspect of loving our neighbour will be another day's topic. So loving God is the key to a successful walk with God. Everything else that comes from our love for God is what makes us have a successful walk with him.

The love for God is a beauty that cannot be corrupted. Everything that comes in contact with it yields beauty. No matter what life throws at a person who loves God, the effect cannot work against a successful walk with God. It is like a beautiful piece of gold more beautiful than other golds and in fact powerful too. Gold on a normal day would lose its beauty when covered with unpleasant things. But cast any unpleasant thing at the love for God, not only does the unpleasant thing lack the ability to cover the beauty of such love, but such love has the power that unfailingly changes such an unpleasant thing into what is beautiful. Cast a rotten wood at the piece of gold we call love and it changes the wood to silver. Cast even dung at it and it changes the dung to rubies. Nothing touches love and remains the same or unwanted. Let a heart filled with love be thronged with vices, that love cannot be overcome by them. Rather, they all shall yield virtue as we shall see later on. For this reason, the affection for God is of necessity about the beginning and the maintaining factor of our successful walk with him. While the pull of God is the first preceding cause of all things, both of those who don't walk with God at all, or those who walk with him a while and wreck their faith. But loving God is the preceding cause of a successful walk with him.

To Bishop Aurelius Augustine, the presence of love is itself all of

righteousness and the absence of love is in itself sin. Not even what love moves us to do and what the absence of it moves us to do. He says, “That, however, is sin in which there is either not the love which ought to be, or where the love is less than it ought to be.” He means even when something appears to be good, without love or with inadequate love, it remains a sin. And he also says, “when good is done by the fear of penalty, not by the love of righteousness good is not yet well done.” Love is all. Even a good action done without love is not well done.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, “... there is a necessity of advancing in the way to the kingdom of God, of the contempt of the world, of denying ourself and bearing of our Lord's cross, which is no less needful for us than daily food. And among many marks that we are on this journey, and under sail toward heaven, this is one, when the love of God so filleth our hearts, that we forget to love, and care not much for the having, or wanting of, other things;” Loving God is essential for our Christian journey. Whatever it may be we come across in our Christian journey, whether in areas of Christian devotion, service to God, or service to the church, once the love of God fills our heart, we can be sure that we shall succeed in our heavenward journey. Not just to arrive at home but to also arrive triumphantly home. As it is the preceding cause, so is it the sustaining factor of our successful walk with him. There is nothing that life can throw at us that will harm our walk with God.

It is just like Adam and Noah. Adam, representing God's pull, is the proto-ancestor of all mankind, but Noah, representing love, is the ancestor of all that escaped the flood and the world after that. Adam of course is the proto ancestor of all men, including

Noah. But all the descendants of Adam perished in the flood saving Noah and his family. This same way all perish who feel the pull of God's love but don't get to this point of loving God. But in Noah, representing the love for God, are men sustained to this day. For this reason all men after the flood, to this present day, have Noah as an ancestor too. So we who are living this day all have two ancestors in common. That I believe is a good illustration of the relationship between the first preceding cause of our walk with God, which are those numerous things by which God draws men, and the second and essential preceding cause of a successful walk with God, which is love. For all men must feel the pull of God's love, but only those who are led by this pull to a point of loving God shall be sustained.

Reason: The Origin Of The Love For God

"We love him, because..."
(1 John 4:19)

Our Richard of St. Victor, in his devout treatise titled Benjamin Minor which we've looked at in which he presented a list of virtues to be sought after by the Christian person, and vices which must be kept under if that Christian must experience the sweetness of God. The first things mentioned, both of equal importance, are reason and affection. By affection he meant love for God. He had this to say;

“two mights are in a man's soul, given of the Father of Heaven of whom all good cometh. The one is reason, the other is affection; through reason we know, and through affection we feel or love.

“Of reason springeth right counsel and ghostly [i.e. spiritual] wits; and of affection springeth holy desires and ordained feelings. And right as Rachel and Leah were both wives unto Jacob, right so man's soul through light of knowing in the reason, and sweetness of love in the affection, is spoused unto God.”

The origin of love for God is reason. Any love that is genuine must be founded on a proper reason. Sound reason must of necessity lead us to love so much that reason and love for God are inseparable. And by this I mean that it is unreasonable not to love God.

There is a trend in our days for people to be looking for or claiming to have what is called unconditional love, unconditional meaning not subject to any condition. But I don't know where the origin of these things is from. I'm certain however that it is not from scriptures. What we see in scriptures is, "We love him, because..." (1 John 4:19). Certainly this is not unconditional love. Our love for God can't be unconditional. Rather, he has met all the conditions to merit more than all our love.

Apart from not being scriptural, anything that is unconditional is like something without a logical base, like a floating castle. Do you believe in floating castles? Then don't believe in unconditional things. It is like having love without a reason. If a man loves his wife, it has to be for a reason. That reason is what informs that love. He loves her "because..." And that

reason for which he loves her can't be positive for other women. There is something that informs his love for his wife that is negative when it comes to other women. If he loves his wife for no reason then ought he to love other women the way he loves his wife. But it is only rational to love his wife for a reason and love her alone and above all others. If he loves his children, it has to be for a reason. He can't love other children the way he loves his own. There has to be something in his children that makes him to love them. It could be that they are the result of the tender love he has for his wife. It could be the resemblance of himself and his wife he sees in them. It could be the joy of watching them grow. Or whatever. These things are not true of other children so much that it would not be rational if he should love other children like he loves his own.

And this is why I fault those who claim that if one is to have a house help or a servant he ought to treat that house help the way he treats his own children. That is irrational. Provided you treat them well and not treat them wickedly it suffices. But you needn't treat them like your own children. If you have two children and one servant, and you treat that servant like your own children then congratulations, you now have three servants. When you have a little child for a servant, it is because she is the child of someone who couldn't fend for her properly. If you send her to school and provide for her meals decently, then it suffices for her parents would be all too glad if only they could do that, but you don't need to bestow all the privileges of your own children on them. The Bible is particularly against treating servants like children for it says, "He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length." (Proverbs 29:21), and this was said disapprovingly especially when taken in the context from verse 19 down to 21. Servants must be servants and children must be on a separate

pedestal from other children. One must however be careful that they watch against their children feeling proud or treating servants with contempt. By this they shall learn temperance and right judgment.

All through scriptures we see people bestowing love for a reason. Isaac loved Esau and here's why, "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison..." (Genesis 25:28). Jacob loved Joseph and here's why, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours." (Genesis 37:3). Israel and Judah loved David and here's why, "But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them." (1 Samuel 18:16). The psalmist of course loved the Lord and here's why, "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications." (Psalm 116:1). The whole of that psalm is full of why the psalmist loved the Lord. The virgins in the Song of Solomon loved the male character and here's why, "Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee." (Song of Solomon 1:3). God loves Jesus Christ his Son and here's why, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." (John 10:17). So people love for all manner of reasons from food to perfume to valiancy and all. People are loved for both great and noble things, virtue, and even awkward things, like perfume.

Ravi Zacharias said in one of his speeches, starting with a quote of someone whose name I couldn't get very well, that free love is a black and white contradiction of itself. He then went on to say that love was never meant to be free. How true. If it is not free, it means it can't be causeless. If it is not causeless it means there are conditions to be met before love can be. And where

we find love there have been conditions that have been met by which it came about.

Even in the matrimonial declaration of commitment, where the intending couple say things like "for better for worse, in riches and in poverty etc.," we find something we could call unconditional love for the declaration of love states that there is no condition under which that love shall cease or change, but such declaration does not make the love between couples an unconditional one. Everything said in that declaration is said upon the condition that the day in which they made such declaration they have chosen (after considering a host of things and a host of conditions being met) to be married and be called husband and wife. Upon this great condition is all that declaration made. Upon this mighty condition is that love founded. This, my brothers and sisters, is far from being an unconditional love.

By the way, what manner of person would wish to be loved for nothing? If I'd be loved by any I'd be glad if it were for a reason. Probably that I'm so awesome and that I'm always on time to save the world from destruction. For someone to tell me that he or she loves me for no reason is just like someone coming to me with a face full of gratitude to say "thanks for nothing." It would be far better if the person had said they can't say exactly why they feel grateful but for some reason they're not aware of why they're grateful. At least there's a reason though it be unknown. That were far better than to show an expression of gratitude despite being fully convinced there's no reason for it. If someone should say he or she loves me and when I ask why, he or she says, "I love you for nothing." I wouldn't be too excited about that. I'd probably wished he or she just walked by without expressing that empty love.

Though there are many reasons for loving God, there is one principal reason, which is, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19). This love is what makes him put in place all the many things appointed by him to draw us to himself and seek reconciliation with us. Yea, indeed he says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jeremiah 31:3). All the cords he throws around us to draw us to himself are cords of love. We love him as a response to the love he has for us. So when I talk of loving God being the preceding cause of our successful walk with him, I do not mean that we can take credit for it. We can't love him by ourselves but can only love in response to his own love. As one writer puts it, he "loves us into loving."

As for his loving us, one may think that his love for us is causeless and therefore unconditional. While I haven't seen (or can't remember) any text that tells us the reason of his loving us, because we are worthless dusts of the ground, yet we read concerning him, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16). God does not merely love but he is himself love. So he loves because it is his nature to love. Had he a nature contrary to this then his love for us would have been a causeless one and therefore unconditional. So I believe the cause of his love is in his nature. The origin of his love for us is in himself and our love is a response to his loving us. That of course is an insufficient explanation for why God loves us, but at least we know that it is not entirely without a reason.

Reason is the origin of our loving God. We love him because it is the right and sensible thing to do. It is a moral response to

his love for us because the only worthy return for God's love is our love. To fail to love him is to rob him. That is to deny him that which is his due. And that is immoral. Furthermore, it is also a sensible response because of the immense benefits that come from loving him. For this cause, our benefit is often the reason that the fallen man sees before the moral reason. The fallen man is often prone to see things that are of his benefits. So it is often what we stand to benefit from him that causes us to love him, and being drawn to him by that love and regenerated in his presence, we can then proceed to love him as a moral response to his love. This moral response is a purer love than loving him for the immense benefit of loving him.

To this agrees Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) who wrote, "So then in the beginning man loves God, not for God's sake, but for his own. It is something for him to know how little he can do by himself and how much by God's help, and in that knowledge to order himself rightly towards God, his sure support." So following his explanation we love God first for fear of damnation. But the true, pure and best reason to love is for himself because he first loved us. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. And he died that we may be saved from damnation. And coming to him we find him to be exceedingly loveable. So we often start from the point of this benefit and later proceed to love him with the purer reason of loving him for himself.

Bernard of Clairvaux went on to write, "When Moses was in the wilderness, he could not hear God until something attracted him through his curiosity..." There is that something that also attracts us to God. As we have seen, there is not a man born of a woman that God has not pulled one way or the other to his Son, but in those who didn't come to Christ, they probably did not

see the burning bush and so did not turn aside to examine it. Others saw it but did not wonder at the sight. Few like Moses would turn aside to examine the burning bush and by this means hear God's voice and feel the warmth of his love.

It is the nature of things that we are attracted to God by something other than him. In most cases it is because of the eternal benefits. I became born again, not because I thought God was so awesome, in fact I had a terrible idea of God at the moment of my conversion. I thought God was this mean being up there whose only interest in man's affairs is to punish us as often as we do wrong. But I fled to him simply because of the dread I had for Hell. It was when I came to him and beheld his awesomeness I began to love him for who he is. I was amazed at his majesty and awesomeness when I came to him. His loving nature, mercy, protection, and all other demonstrations of the deep love he has for us. It was then I began to love him in truth, but deliverance from Hell was all that drove me to him initially, then when I knew him and began to study about him and experience his presence and love, I naturally fell in love with him.

It is written, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18). There are a lot of things for which we can love God, and they are innumerable. We needn't try to list them. St. Bernard said, "all things should be done swiftly and gladly. And see why: swiftly for dread, and gladly for hope, and lovely trust in His mercy." So if we have nothing, we have these three things for which we can do whatsoever we do swiftly, and gladly; they are dread, hope, and his mercy. While dread has a role to play in our walk with God, we can almost do without it when we are intimate with him and are

made perfect in love. But we don't throw it away at any time in our walk with God. It is ever a handy tool to have at hand. We need it when we find ourselves going far from him. When we are close to him however, being perfect in love, the dread disappears. The other two things he mentioned are these; hope and mercy. These things make us love him. The hope he has provided and the mercy he has towards us eases us from that which we have dread for. All this he provided in the person of his Son, and so we are saved and love him return.

Though we have many things for which we can love God, our love isn't perfect until we have started loving him not just for those things that are his, whether it be his mercy, the hope he gives us, neither loving him for the dread of hell but loving him for himself and himself alone. At this point, your love for him is no longer deterred by fears of whether or not you will receive his mercy, whether or not you have hope, but so far as you have God, you are very well satisfied. This is that perfect love with which we should love God. That is the love that goes beyond loving God for what he has done, or can do. Certainly we should love him for these, but far better is loving him for himself. This is that love that casts out all fear. This is that love that does not have torment in it. Fanny Crosby, I believe, had such a love for God when she said "gladly will I toil and suffer, only let me walk with thee." God's presence was all she wanted. There are people that love God when he gives them abundance. Surely if he grants abundance that is a great thing to be grateful for, but her love was beyond that. Her love was not bound to abundance. Toiling and suffering meant nothing to her. These were not enough to introduce fear to her heart. All she wanted was to have that residing presence of God. Not the visiting presence but the residing presence of God. Herein is love.

A.W. Tozer said, "Fear and love binds humanity in two golden chains." Fear of earthly things and love for earthly things holds us captive. When we love the things of this world, we become filled with the fear of losing them. Of course we'd eventually lose everything earthly anyways, and nothing in this world is truly ours. We needn't have hope of keeping them. If we love them, the only thing we can do is sit there in despair and fear for when we will lose everything to our very bodies. Nothing shall be left us. As the hymnodist Adelaide A. Procter (1825–1864) wrote, "For thou who knowest, Lord, how soon Our weak heart clings, Hast given us joys, tender and true, Yet all with wings; So that we see gleaming on high Diviner things." This is how love and fear binds humanity. But, when we love God above these things, it casts out all fear and loses us from the bonds of fear. For though we lose all in this life and can't keep anything, we'll always have God in life, in death, and eternity. A.W. Tozer rounded off his statement saying, "the gospel of Jesus Christ never is finished until it goes on to set us free from loves and fears."

The pure love of loving God for himself alone is necessary for a successful walk with him. This isn't easy seeing we're part of a fallen race. The self is always after its own interest and its gain is often what drives it in every pursuit. So while loving God for our own self may come quite easy, loving him for his own self alone comes by a conscious effort and prayer. Failure to do this would result in an unsuccessful walk with him. This is because loving God for something other than himself alone is the natural cause of a steady decline in devotion and a steady increase in compromise. Though our loving him may start off by loving him for something other than himself, yet we must consciously and prayerfully work towards loving him for himself. It is loving God for none other than himself that shall aid us through our lives

journey. Else we shall fall by the wayside.

We may not be perfect in this love and we may find ourselves returning to the state of loving him for something other than himself from time to time. But we ought to always return to that pure and sincere love at every time we discover we have left that sincere love. That is why Jesus said to the church of Ephesus, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:4 - 5).

The children of Israel sought God and professed their love for him when they needed him but as soon as they were safe, secure and prosperous, they began to follow their own hearts' inclination. We may stand on our own fictitious heights of perfection and look down upon the children of Israel and condemn them, but what we see in them is a reflection of what humanity is by nature. About this Isaac Watts wrote a hymn with the following words,

"Great God, how oft did Israel prove
By turns Thine anger and Thy love?
There in a glass our hearts may see
How fickle and how false they be."

He went on to narrate God's dealings with the Jews and the Jews dealings with God. God was ever loving them but at times they wandered far from him and when he punishes them they come back to him again and start seeking him. But when he removes their punishment they wander away from him again. It shows you how hardly any can love God with that pure and

perfect love. As in a mirror we can see ourselves through God's dealings with the Jews how false and fickle our hearts are, and how prone to wander from God they are. So loving God for himself alone, rather than for our own interests, is one thing that we have to strive to do. It is not something we should think we can do naturally. Our nature is averse to that pure love and so to love God with a pure and sincere love can only come by conscious strife. We must do it else our walk with him may not endure.

Through the power of God we can love truly and sincerely. His Holy Spirit helps us to love, for the first fruit of the Spirit is love.

The Debt Of Love

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."
(Romans 13:8)

Now, in realising God's love for us it naturally shows us how much debt we owe. And we owe both God and man all the love we can give. And we cannot fully pay it, therefore the Bible does not bother commanding us to pay the debt of love in full for we can't pay that fully nor sufficiently. But we must give all that we have to give and strive to give it.

Though we strive to give it yet must we do so cheerfully. Samuel Rutherford wrote, "He is an ill debtor who payeth that which he hath borrowed with a grudge." So we are ill debtors if

we give God the love we owe him with a grudge. Seeing we can only pay back a super tiny part of what we owe him, we should present the little we can with all the joy we have. At least we have something to give. He's magnanimous, and the little we have to offer is what he wants.

To have an idea concerning what we owe him, we must consider the immense magnitude of his love for us. Again Samuel Rutherford wrote, “His love hath neither brim nor bottom; His love is like Himself, it passeth all natural understanding.” The love of God is really immense. It indeed passes all understanding.

It is upon the immensity of this love that Frances Ridley Havergal wrote her wondrous hymn "True Hearted, Whole Hearted, Faithful And Loyal." A hymn I'm sure I've made reference to a number of times. The hymn tells us about why we ought to give our whole hearts to God, saying, "Only the whole can be perfectly true." And seeing the immensity of God's love and all he has done for us, we can say "only the whole can be worthy of him..." So let's give God all of our hearts.

It is worthy of note at this point that the way we love and treat others has a way of leaking into the way we treat God. I also speak from experience and the examinations of my inward motions. If we are always in the habit of treating others with contempt, we shall find that though we strive against it, we shall, if we carefully examine ourselves, discover that we tend to have contempt for God and his ways too. If we are hot tempered and easily angered, we shall find that this is the way we easily get angry about God and his ways too. I have found this to be so by experience. When I'm angered by people or circumstances, when I go to the place of prayer, I tend to pray in anger too.

It is for a similar reason the apostle John says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). This confirms to us that how we love others is a good mirror that shows us how we love God. So we shouldn't be so focused on loving God and forget about loving others.

I have encountered people, and have at least felt myself being forward to think that way too, that our relationship with men is insignificant and that only our relationship with God is important. But this is contrary to the Bible. We must live at peace and in love with all men, both believers and unbelievers alike. Someone explained to me that he doesn't need to go to church to fellowship with others quoting, "... and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3). Meaning, men are not important. We can just sit at home, read our Bibles, pray, sing, etc., and fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. But that is quoting that verse out of context and that is easy to tell. For in saying our fellowship, it means our fellowship, collectively as Christians is with the Father. For Jesus himself says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20). So, while we can fellowship with God and his Christ as individuals, our fellowship together is important to God and for our edification. I shall speak more on this in a chapter in the next section about living in peace with men.

So, let us learn to love men in general, not just people of the brotherhood, but all men in general. As this can tell us, like a mirror, how our relationship with God is. If our relationship

with others is sour, it is very likely that our relationship with God is also sour. I believe it is for this reason that the Bible says, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18). And we are expressly commanded, "Follow peace with all men..." (Hebrews 12:14). So let your relationship with all men be loving, respectful, and cordial.

Apart from these commands, it is expedient to love others as much as possible for if we can't pay God enough, we can remit a little more of our debt by loving others. Seeing we can't pay this debt enough, let us show love in every way, at every time, and to everybody.

The Jealous Lover

"For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."
(Exodus 34:14)

Now let us come to a very important aspect of God's love. A.W. Tozer said in one of his sermons, "Our old teacher-friend. The Cloud of Unknowing, gives us some light on proper motives in relationship to the nature of God Himself. "God is a jealous lover and He suffereth no rival," this saint wrote it more than 600 years ago." Indeed God is a jealous God. Many verses confirm this. Read Exodus 20:5, Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, Deuteronomy 5:9, and Deuteronomy 6:15. And truly he was provoked to jealousy a number of times. Read Deuteronomy 32:16, 21. It is sad that we often hear about the love, kindness,

goodness, etc. of God, but hear so little of his jealousy. But there are innumerable verses that reiterate the fact that he is a jealous God. So our God is a jealous God and does not allow any rival. Neither is he quiet or passive about his feeling of jealousy. When provoked by it, he does not keep it in but pours out vengeance upon those who provoke his jealousy and does whatever he thinks best, according to his infinite wisdom, to first prevent his people from provoking his jealousy, and to pour his vengeance on them should they still provoke it.

In Hosea, it is written, "Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." (Hosea 2:6 - 7). This is God, using an imagery, saying he will hedge up the way of his people with thorns so that they shall not find their ways to their lovers, which were Baal and other idols to the peoples of the time, but to us it refers to everything we love as much as we love God or more than him. This shall then make them return to him their first husband. When he says he's going to hedge up their ways with thorns, it means he will prevent them with sufferings and afflictions. These he does because he's a jealous God.

Love is the natural cause of jealousy and if God is love then it is but natural that his name should be Jealous (Exodus 34:14). It is written, "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" (James 4:5). You can't be jealous over someone you don't love. When you feel jealous over someone it means he/she is of great value to you. I know there are some people who try to speak against this feeling of jealousy

over the object of one's love. Some say it is immaturity, and others say other negative things about the feeling of jealousy, but people who say such know little about love and don't understand what love really means. Let them say what they will, God does not feel that way and does not think being jealous is a thing that shows immaturity. In fact he gave a law called "Law of Jealousies" in Numbers 5:11-31. If it were immaturity, God would not give a law concerning it. I mean he's that jealous.

I know people who love everybody of the opposite sex (or do we say they hate everybody?). For thinking they should love everybody they hurt everybody. And what else do we think of someone whose actions hurt others than to think of them as someone who's hateful of others. But this hateful deed is effected by unrestrained love. A man who had a wife with such personality said if you had a wife like his own and didn't understand her, because of the way she shows love to everybody you'd be so angry and hit your head on the wall. If such a person were single and had, by their behaviour, attracted singles of the opposite sex, one of them who have been attracted by such a foolish show of love would be forced to wonder, "are you going to be mine, or theirs, or ours?" God does not expect spouses or people in general to be loose in the way they show love to others. They ought to show restraint so as not to provoke the jealousy of his or her spouse. Why should a man hit his head on the wall on account of his spouse's behaviour? You can't be everyone's lover. And when the object of one's love does not show restraint in the way they behave towards others, it is natural and reasonable to feel worried and jealous. And when someone behaves this way, though he or she may not be involved in actual adultery, it is unchaste all the same. But some see it as a form of maturity when men can put up with such unchaste behaviours. Let people behave in whatever way they

will, God is not that way neither does he see it as maturity to put up with such nonsensical love. God will not accept lovers with such traits to be his. The lover he would accept as his is that lover which loves him alone and being always conscious of this makes it so obvious.

What God requires from us is nothing but a chaste love. We should love our neighbour and indeed all creation, but we must love him above all things. We must not love anything above him. In fact we must not love anything at all. But our loving other things must be because he wills it. So our loving other things (whatsoever they be) should be as an expression of love to him. For example he says, "love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). So when we love our neighbour, it is because we love him, and it is an expression of the same. When he says "husbands love your wives..." (Ephesians 5:25), husbands should therefore love their wives because they love him who commanded them to love their wives. When it is written, "teach the younger women to love their husbands..." (Titus 2:4), let the women love their husbands because they love him who commanded them to be so taught. Yet must we not love these other things as much as we love him. And to show the level of jealousy he has, Christ says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26). So, it's a matter of hating. He wants to be exclusively loved and really feel that exclusivity that others would be so devoid of our love that it may well be considered hatred towards them. This throws out the thought that he can entertain the company of such "lovers of everybody." He is a jealous lover that suffers no rival.

So we must be very careful not to love anything else as much as

we love God. The moment we love anything, even our family members or our own lives more than Christ, we prove ourselves to be unworthy of him. We must not love the blessings of God more than him.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, "It is the crooked love of some harlots, that they love bracelets, ear-rings, and rings better than the lover that sendeth them. God will not so be loved; for that were to behave as harlots, and not as the chaste spouse, to abate from our love when these things are pulled away." Many today love God for what they think they'd get from him. They serve him thinking that by this means they'd get something from him. Preachers also preach sermons that make people think that God should be so used. Using him and loving him hypocritically for our own benefit. That is the love of a harlot and not of a chaste spouse. Our love for God must not be tied to any expectation of gain or favour. All our dealings with him must be on account of our chaste love for himself.

I believe a major reason why many pull away from God and his Christ is because there is this consciousness deep within our souls that this Christ that calls us is a jealous lover. If you'd be his he'll take all of you entirely to himself. He'd not leave anything of all you love. He'd wish to be the sole object of your love. And for this reason, the love of the world would keep many back. Before my conversion, I occasionally saw myself in a dream, and in that dream I'd be in darkness, and not far away from where I stood in darkness I'd see people in some form of Christian devotion. Where these people were would be full of light but I in darkness and in that darkness was also full of fear. The fear that I may get bitten by a snake or some other dangerous creature which may be lurking in the darkness of where I stood. Yet to approach the light would be so repulsive

to me and as a result I'll stand away from the light till I wake up. It was on the day I got converted due to the fear of hell that I saw myself in a trance, in darkness again, but this time a door to the room where I sat in darkness was opened and light flooded the room, then I, getting up from where I sat on the ground, walked towards the glorious light of Christ. Why did I keep back so long? What was it that made me love darkness with all its terrors more than that glorious light which my soul yearned for? These dreams I had revealed to me the state of my heart. My fading memory reminds me that though I was born in a Christian family and was always encouraged to accept Christ as my Lord and Saviour and become born again, one of the issues I had in those times that kept me back was that I was conscious deep within me of the fact that if I came to Christ I'd have to quit and leave many things I loved even though I didn't know what those things were in particular. By some mysterious repulsiveness I knew this Christ that called me to himself was going to take things from me and I didn't like the idea. So approaching a one that will demand everything from us is a scary thing that causes many to shy away from this jealous lover. It caused me to stay away for so long until the fear of hell drove me to him.

It is obvious that one of the reasons we don't experience much of the richness of God's presence is because we have made an idol of one another. In my book on Christian dressing, I wrote about perspectivism, opinionism, and relativism, and the problems these cause in our midsts as Christians. When we hold such a view that everything is relative and that we should respect other views, it shows we allow for multiplicity of views on things regarding the faith, whereas we should not allow such for we have one God and only his view should we accept. The moment we start entertaining multiplicity of views in our

judgments, it just shows how we have displaced God and made room on his throne for all the people with opposing and condescending views. People who look up to God alone to know which view to have on each particular issue would not assume that the view of any other should be accepted as true. Whenever we entertain multiplicity of views we consider each other's opinion and leave out God's stand in our judgments. Therefore we are now exalted above God. The jealous lover won't tolerate that.

This reminds me of how men of some western countries are treated in their own homes. A man is held like a hostage in his own house, rather like a slave. A pet is placed above a man in his own house. If there's an issue in the family, when the police come they take the woman's report on the incident, take the children's report, and leave. They don't give ear to the man. He has no say. Had pets been able to talk they'd give ear to the pet too, but not the man. In his own house? How wicked? That is how opinionism makes us treat our God. We take each other's views but leave God's words out. Yet is it God's church and the faith of God. You can read all I have to say on the matter of perspectivism in my book titled, "OUR HOLY CHRISTIAN DRESSING TRADITIONS AND APPEARANCE." And it is completely free. We must not make an idol of ourselves. We must place God above all our opinions and shut out our opinions and perspectives. God shall not dwell with those who have so wickedly dethroned him in any way. In fact such shall experience his wrath not his presence.

Now to making we ourselves an idol. When we hold the theory of perspectivism, a man dethrones God and enthrone others together with himself. But I now speak of when man enthrones just himself. This can often be noticed by the way a person

reacts when he's reproved with God's word. Many pick offence and keep malice on that account. They're angry because they've enthroned themselves and dethroned God. I've witnessed expressions of anger especially when talking about what women ought not to wear and the roles women ought to play in the church. They get angry and their countenance towards you changes. But he who hasn't dethroned God would repent when he is reproved with God's word, for even in his error, he only does them in ignorance, or for some other reason for which he would definitely repent of once he knows they're not inline with the word of God. But because they sit on the throne of their hearts which is meant for God alone, they'll be fuming rather than repent.

Even in our love for God we must be careful still for our hearts are so deceitful. For example, service to God is an act of love, but we must be careful not to be so engaged in his service that we fail to have time for him. Should this happen, we have, in the earnestness of showing our love to him, placed our service to him above him. Samuel Rutherford also noted that even in the sweetness of our fellowship with God, we must be careful not to make an idol of that same sweetness, lest we seek God not for himself but merely for the sweetness of our fellowship with him. How right he was! If we must be careful of the very sweetness that comes from the love of God from becoming an idol, how much more should we guard against other things.

So, let him that comes to God for a loving relationship know that he is a jealous God who shall not tolerate any rival. And so, in coming to God, one must put aside all things that pose to be a rival to God including the self by dethroning it. For he shall either be loved exclusively and above all others or not be loved at all. He loves us perfectly, and nothing short of that

perfect love can be a worthy way of returning his love. The love that is a bit close to being worthy of him is expressed by John Wesley thus:

"Take my poor heart and let it be,
Forever closed to all but Thee;
Seal Thou my breast, and let me wear
Thy pledge of love forever there."

Perfect love is that love in which we love God above everything else no matter what it be. The psalmist wrote "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth." (Psalm 108:5). Perfect love is that love that exalts God above everything else. Once we love him above all, the fear of losing anything in this present life will be gone, for we know we will always have him no matter what happens. We'll be so confident in life that the powers of darkness can't do anything to us. You've broken their chains. You'd triumphantly walk to heaven. The powers of Hell can't stand under the weight of perfect love for God.

Many, loving this world, can't go the whole way with God. When they love the world, the love for the things of God will begin to die. In fact we can't have the love of the world and the love of God simultaneously. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15). So to love God is to hate the world and to love the world is to be at enmity with God. When we love God above all things else, the love for other things will begin to die and we will walk more freely with him. So loving God with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the might, is about the beginning and the sustaining factor of a successful walk with God. God, the jealous lover, will

not accept anything less.

In order to round off this aspect of the jealousy of God, I will leave off with some more quotes from Samuel Rutherford on the matter.

"What ye love besides Jesus, your husband, is an adulterous lover."

"God will have you to rejoice in nothing but Himself. God forbid that ye should rejoice in anything but in the cross of Christ (Gal. vi. 14)."

"Let us learn to turn our eyes off men, that our whorish hearts doat not on them, and woo our old Husband, and make Him our darling."

"We make an idol of our will. As many lusts in us, as many gods; we are all godmakers. We are like to lose Christ, the true God, in the throng of those new and false gods."

"We have idol-love, and are whorishly inclined to love other things beside our Lord;"

Maintaining Our Love For God

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."
(Matthew 24:12)

As many as wish to have a successful walk with God must ensure they strive to keep their love for God alive. Love can't thrive naturally in the presence of the host of things that work against it. We must guard it jealously, actively, and circumspectly. We must make sure it is kept warm at all times. Once our love grows cold, our walk with God comes to a halt. It is our sole responsibility, personally and as a church, to ensure that our love for God remains warm and affectionate.

I am not sure love can die. If love can die it is those "unconditional love" people sometimes have that can die. As we have said, love is never unconditional. And that love must be founded on reason. But many at the start love unconditionally without reason, thinking it is indeed love, then when they're in a relationship with the person and things go in ways they find unpleasant, they suddenly start asking why they're in that relationship in the first place. Now they're suddenly interested in knowing the reason why they thought they loved this or that person. Not finding any reason, they back out of the relationship. But those who love God for a reason, the right and perfect reason, cannot back out of the relationship with him for our love is not unconditional. And he is ever meeting more than those conditions required for our love.

However, we can be certain that love can grow cold and profitless if not jealously guarded. Matthew 24:12 says, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." The cause of this coldness is iniquity. Sin has always been an enemy of God since the fall of man. When we love God with all the heart and sin is present, it is always inviting us to the other side. It is ever wooing us from our true lover. Due to this constant invitation that is ever there from another adulterous lover, if we don't consciously strive to maintain the love we

have for our first husband and ensure it is ever warm and cordial it shall grow cold. This truth is what Jesus points out to us in Matthew 24:12. When iniquity abounds, so shall its entreaties with many offers abound, and in the presence of this copious entreaties it takes only the truly strong in love to remain with her true lover.

The warmth of our love for God can only be maintained by knowing him more and more, his holy and perfect will, and in well doing according to his commandments. Anybody who flouts the commandments of God would naturally feel the warmth of the love for God waning. But if we want our love for God to be warm and cordial, we must keep his commandments. It is a natural phenomenon. It is written, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments...." (1 John 5:3). Unless we exercise ourselves in this love by means of obedience to his commandments our love would naturally die.

When the psalmist wrote "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness..." (Psalm 96:9), it informs us that holiness has its beauty. And this beauty is inspired by the warmth of divine love. Anyone who must maintain the love of God must flee from sin and pursue a holy life.

Let us conclude with a verse from the hymn by Charles Wesley:

"God only knows the love of God;
O that it now were shed abroad
In this poor stony heart!
For love I sigh, for love I pine;
This only portion, Lord, be mine,
Be mine this better part."

Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Father, teach me to love you more and more each day. Let my love be so chaste that it shall never provoke your jealousy. Let me love you exclusively. And may my love for you be ever warm as I maintain absolute obedience to your commandments. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 11: THE FEAR OF GOD

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."
(Ecclesiastes 12:13)

"Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD."
(Psalm 34:11)

Before we proceed, it is good to touch on the fear of God briefly more directly though we had hinted at it before. I talked on the issue of the fear of God in detail in my book, "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE" in the subchapter titled, "FEAR" in the chapter, **"**THE GLORY AND EXCELLENCY OF THE CROSS.**"** Kindly read that for more on this topic. But I'd still wish to make some brief points here.....

In talking about approaching God, we need to balance the love of him with the fear of him. You don't approach God with a lackadaisical attitude. You do so in fear and trembling. You do so with caution. Not with a caution that'll keep you back from approaching him but with a caution that enables you approach him the right way. This is because love and fear combine to draw us to God the right way.

Proverbs 16:6, "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." Mercy is available

through Christ who is himself the truth, and so in him is our iniquity purged and we become sanctified, but it is by the fear of the Lord we depart from evil and remain sanctified in him. And being sanctified we can approach him without offence to him.

It is written, "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." (Leviticus 10:3). This was said when the sons of Aaron died. The men, being priests, had drawn close to God to offer sacrifices, but either by ignorance or by nonchalance they offered strange fires and they were both killed. Drawing close to God requires us to be careful how we relate with him, and so fear and tremble. We don't draw close to him lackadaisically. We must be well informed on his demands lest we offend him and bear the dire consequences.

Richard of St. Victor wrote, "The ghostly experience of the proof of this working standeth all in a reverent affection that a man hath to God in the time of his prayer, caused of this dread in the ground of this work, and of this stirring of love, the which is brought in by the ghostly steps of this staff hope, touched before. For why, reverence is nought else but dread and love medled together with a staff of certain hope..." All our acts of devotion and piety must be done in the spirit of the fear of God.

Prayer: Dear Father, teach us to fear you deeply and reverence you as our God. Help us to draw close to you the right way devoid of all offence. This we ask in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

CHAPTER 12: THE DILIGENT SEARCH FOR GOD

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me."

(Song of Solomon 3:1 - 4)

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

(Hosea 10:12)

We had spoken about the means by which God draws us to himself and the voices with which he intreats us. Knowing this and feeling the tender pull of his cord, the right and reasonable response to this is to seek him with the whole of the heart and, finding him, to follow him evermore. In this chapter we shall be talking about seeking God.

The Rationale Of Seeking God

"But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night."
(Job 35:10)

As we had said, the right and reasonable response to God's tender pull is to seek him with all the heart. Everything by which God pulls us calls us to seek him. We have talked about how the very nature of creation draws us to God. This is the universal pull that goes beyond bounds of the Christian faith. It pulls all men and the wise respond to it, not just to acknowledge it but to seek after him that pulls them.

As Jesus said to each of his disciples, "follow me," they all rose up and followed him. That was a rational response. Though we don't hear his voice urging us, we all do feel his pull. And that pull demands from us a rational response. Not everyone to whom Christ called gave his call a rational response to his verbal call. It is written, "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." (Matthew 19:21 - 22). I think this happens to be the only person who Christ called to follow him that he gave such rich promises such as having treasure in heaven as a reward of following him. Yet he gave his call an irrational response. It is also written, "And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:59 - 60). These men gave the call of Christ an irrational response. But they who

heard his call and gave it a rational response all rose up without a word and followed him. As they did, so ought every other person who would give a right and rational response to all the voices that intreat us rise up and seek after the God whose voice calls them to come to him. I like the hymn of John G. Whittier with a verse which goes:

"In simple trust like theirs who heard,
Beside the Syrian sea,
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word,
Rise up and follow Thee."

So all the pull of nature and all the voices that intreat us are all begging for the rational response of seeking after God.

Wise Job said, "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety." (Job 5:8 - 11). Job resolved to seek God after observing both the wonders of the nature of things and the course of man. Everything man sees calls him to his God and all the wise that ever lived realised this call and gave it the rational response Job gave. But the same Job realised how few there be who consider these things well enough to give a rational response to the pull of nature to seek after God. He said, "But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night." (Job 35:10). What a doleful realisation.

When we look at creation and the wonders of it and the goodness of God manifestly evident in it, the only right, rational,

and wise response is to seek after God the Creator. There have been many wise responses as the countless religions that flooded the world revealed, but as we have seen, they all failed to find God. In fact they found devils instead. But at least they went after him. Their failure doesn't change the fact that they felt the pull of nature on them to their God and gave it a rational response. They sought God despite having no valid means by which to find him because no rational man would behold the wonders of creation and not seek the maker. We have seen him in Christ.

Secondly, love compels us to search diligently after God. Creation advises us to seek after God, but love compels us to seek after him. It is natural to seek after the object of our love. In the key verse of this chapter we see how love compels us to seek the object of our love. At the strangest of hours the woman in the songs of Solomon began to yearn for her lover and sought him all around. She said, "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth... The watchmen that go about the city found me." Not only was it at night that her heart yearned for her spouse, it was late at night for she was already in bed. And when she went about in search of him, the men on patrol were already on duty. The second time she sought him in such a way she was wounded by them. She said, "The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me." (Song of Solomon 5:7). It is dangerous to be roaming about at night like that. One would look like a threat when roaming around at such an hour. Probably this was why she was bruised. The compulsion of love is great. So if truly we love God, it will reflect in the way we pursue him.

Thirdly we have a command to seek him. It is written, "Seek ye

the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:6). It is disobedience not to seek him. And seeing the blessings that come with the command to seek him we see that it is foolish not to seek him.

So, nature advises us, love compels us, and his commands obliges us to seek him and to seek him with the whole of the heart. We shall consider the fourth below.

The Golden Paradox

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."
(Isaiah 55:6)

Bernard of Clairveux wrote, **"**But here is the paradox that no one can seek the Lord who has not already found him. It is thy will o God that thou mayest be found that thou mayest be sought. To be sought that thou mayest more truly be found.**"** This is a beautiful paradox. First, all of nature entreats us to come to God and the natural, reasonable, and moral response is to seek him. And having sought him, and beholding his love and loveliness, we begin to love him, seeing he's met all the conditions of our love. And when this happens, though we have now seen and found him, yet we seek him the more. Tasting of the sweetness of his love and goodness we seek for more and more of his love. The reason for seeking him yet the more is because we have found him. This is God's will, as Bernard of Clairveux wrote. The fourth reason for seeking God therefore is because we have found him.

Finding God and realising and experiencing his love results in a diligent search for him. And if there were a time to seek the Lord, whom wisdom and reason compels us to love, I suppose it is now. In this evil age where satanism is on the rise. It is creeping everywhere and even into the church. Seeking God is an essential task if heaven is a must. Not that casual searching but a diligent search for God would do in these sad days of ours.

To what we've said agrees Samuel Rutherford who wrote, "Christ is an unknown Christ to the young ones; and therefore they seek Him not, because they know Him not. Bid them come and see, and seek a kiss of His mouth; and then they will find His mouth is so sweet, that they will be everlastingly chained unto Him by their own consent."

Apostle Paul wrote, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death..." (Philippians 3:9 - 11). Despite knowing God so intimately he still desired to know him more intimately still. His knowing God was the reason for counting everything but dung and the purpose of knowing him yet the more.

We find another example with Moses too. Despite having wondrous experiences with God above all prophets of all times, he yet desired to see God's face. After a heated conversation with God where he intreated God not to leave the Israelites for their sins, immediately after that he said to God, "I beseech

thee, show me thy glory." (Exodus 33:18). He has known God and seen his glory in the past, yet for the sweetness of his presence and wonder of the sight of his glory, he wanted this once more to see his glory. So we can see this golden paradox coming to play in the lives of saints of bygone years, from the Bible time till this present day. The more we know God the more we would seek him. It is therefore self evident that there is no end to this search.

Going After God

"... Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?"
(Song of Solomon 3:3)

"With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."
(Isaiah 26:9)

The lady in the Songs of Solomon, when she had left the comfort of her bed in search of her spouse said, "The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" (Song of Solomon 3:3). She sought to know the direction her spouse went that she may follow after him. In our diligent search for God, knowing the direction where to search for him is important as our world is full of many impostors and harmful people.

A heart that truly loves God will yearn for him even to its

discomfort. In Songs of Solomon chapter 3, the heart of the lady yearned for her spouse in the night while she was in bed. In this state where no one wishes to be disturbed she said she sought for him whom her soul loveth. Do you love God so much that you can't give yourself rest till you find him? Possibly, you have many comforts in this world, perhaps you have a fine house in a nice section of town, perhaps you have a luxurious car, perhaps you've got a great job, but do you love God with a yearning heart so much that if it need be, you, like the lady who yearned for her spouse, throw off all these comfort and go out into the cold of the night to seek him whom your soul loveth? It takes someone who doesn't love her spouse to be in the shoes of the woman in the Songs of Solomon and bask in the comfort of her bed caring nothing if her spouse existed or not. Same way it is if in the presence of bodily comfort you forget God, it just shows that your heart is devoid of the love of God. Indeed a heart that loves God would even gladly let go of everything sweet and soothing if it stands in between him and God.

She sought him wholeheartedly. If she sought him half heartedly, she'd have given up the search easily when she didn't find him at her door or immediate neighbourhood, but rather she sought him and said "I will rise and go about the city" and about the city she went. She went in the streets, broadways, and when she still didn't find him, she resorted to asking the watchmen. Still she didn't give up. She was soon rewarded for all her effort when she saw him. She laid hold of him and wouldn't let him go. Have you sought for God to this extent? Do you just go to church or live a casual Christian life of only partaking in family devotion, church meetings, and no time to really set aside to personally seek after God with an unceasing effort of personal study of the Bible, personal prayers, personal times of studying spiritual and other useful books? Only such effort can be

rewarded. No casual Christian who will not seek God wholeheartedly can find him, for he is far from such.

Why do I say this? It is written, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13). This is a promise. He says we shall seek him and find him. That is a guarantee. But note the following word, "when," meaning there is a condition to be met. What is the condition? When we search for him with all our heart. If this condition is not met, he shall maintain his distance from you. That too is a promise.

We also read in Hosea "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." (Hosea 10:12). Sowing in a manner that must yield fruit is often not an easy task. I have only a very little knowledge of agriculture but I know that you don't just start sowing your seeds when the time of sowing comes, rather, you'd weed the ground and prepare it for sowing. There are many grounds in which you'd sow your seed and you'll end up reaping little or nothing, either because of the nature of the soil, or because the ground wasn't well prepared. We are told here to sow to ourselves in righteousness. The soil is not the sandy soil of sin, unholiness, profanity, hypocrisy, or lukewarmness, but we are to sow to ourselves in the rich soil of righteousness.

Righteousness is not a popular doctrine in the church today. You don't hear it so much from the pulpit, neither do people write much about it, and the result is evident. We see the tragedy of having God completely out of sight. And that not being enough, it also results in an acute spiritual blindness and numbness. A blindness and numbness that makes us not to even know that

God is far from us. People are rejoicing, dancing, and living their lives as if God were present, not knowing that the manner of evil they practice has driven him far away. And seeing that people are not aware of his absence it means that we have little hope that they will repent with a repentance that shall restore God's presence to us. It is just like in the words of Richard Baxter, "They that never yet knew they were without God, and in the way to hell, did never yet know the way to heaven. Can a man find he hath lost his God, and his soul, and not cry out, I am undone?" The lack of sound doctrine on righteousness, both on what it means to be righteous and how to be righteous, make people unaware that they are without God. Even those who think they preach a sound doctrine, preaching holiness, preach holiness as a word and not in the essence of it or in the practice of it, neither do they define it. They preach holiness and then leave you to define holiness to be anything you like to define it as. That's your problem. They are jubilating on their way to Hell. The fact that they're dancing and singing on their way to Hell, rather than crying "I am undone," shows us that they do not know that they are out of the way of heaven. It is a really sad reality we're facing today in Christendom, a reality that is almost devoid of all hopes. Yet we must however seek this repentance and return to God.

Hosea 10:12 went on to say "reap in mercy." It is when we sow to ourselves in righteousness that we can reap in mercy. For though we sowed ourselves in righteousness we still are not worthy of this great privilege of seeing God, or of experiencing his manifest presence. When through sowing to ourselves in righteousness, we start experiencing the manifest presence of God, we must not think that our experience of him is worth being proud of, but we must know that when we reap, we reap not in our merits, but in his mercy.

It also says "break up your fallow ground." A fallow ground is a ground that is ready to be sown but left to itself. We all have fallow grounds in our lives. By this we understand that we all have the potential of experiencing God richly, but because we haven't sown to ourselves in righteousness our lives are just left fallow. We can also liken breaking up our fallow grounds to mean contrition for to be contrite is to be broken in heart and in spirit (Psalms 51:17). Something we shall talk about specially later.

God in his immense generosity has given each of us a fallow ground we can't fully cultivate. He has made his mystery in all its greatness abundantly available though we can't fathom the length, breadth, and height of the mystery of his majesty. Seeing this, I agree with the statement of Tozer that goes "we all have as much of God as we desire." Meaning the amount of God you have is equivalent to the desire you have for him. If we have only little of him, it's because we desire him only to little extent. If a man went to a car showroom, and there saw a fine Porsche car and wished to buy it, but when he was told the price, he discovered that he couldn't afford buying the nice Samsung TV he wished to buy and buy this at the same time. For this reason he decided he wasn't going to buy the Porsche car. He wanted the car, no doubt about that, but he didn't want it that much. He desired a car as beautiful as it but he wouldn't sacrifice his TV for it. That is how it is with God. Many, if not most people want to experience his presence and be surrounded by his glory, but they don't want him that much. For if you can't have both God and sin, many would choose sin. If you can't have both God and your bad privileges, many would choose bad privileges rather than God. But all these want God, in fact they want him to a great extent, but they don't want him

enough to forsake these mundane things for God's glorious presence. So they have only as much of God as they desire. If we want to have that rich experience of fellowshiping with the Almighty, it is free. It is as free as air, you just have to reach for it. But you must want it to the extent you would sacrifice everything contrary to him and that displeases him.

Hosea 10:12 ends with the words, "for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." Brothers and sisters, it is time to seek the Lord until he come and rain righteousness upon us. Only when we do this shall we find God.

Where Not To Find God

"This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing."
(Jeremiah 13:10)

Back to the imaginations again. One major thing people fail to get is that they think they can know things by means of the imaginations. As we have seen from Richard of St. Victor, the imagination falls in the category of things that we are to keep under and not allow to influence us. We can never by the imaginations of our heart find God. Our imaginations would lead us into idolatry, and this is none other than adultery.

Many times I've seen people say, just follow your heart. But the heart of man is not only useless in our search for God but completely deceitful and wicked. It can't be relied upon. It is written, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The heart itself can't lead you to God. It has a mind of its own and it could lead you to a world of evil without you even knowing it. A friend of mine once posted on Facebook that he followed his heart and it led him to the fridge. That is the only good place I know your heart could readily lead you to. The other places are evil. And another friend on Facebook shared a photo of a fat man looking into an empty fridge with a Dalai Lama quote that says, "that which you seek is already inside you." Even the best place your heart could lead you to sometimes brings you to a point of hard and unnecessarily painful truths, the truth an empty fridge reveals.

As said, the heart has a mind of its own and can outsmart you the owner. It could manipulate you to achieve its own end. I once travelled for the burial of the father of one of my former bosses, and on our way back the people with the driver deliberated on which is the best route to take on our way back home. But after much deliberation the driver insisted that one of the routes was the best to take home. So the people let him have his way since he was a driver and was more used to traveling routes. However we hadn't gone far in the path he chose before he stopped us at a woman's place who sold alcoholic drinks and bought a full keg from her. Apparently he was very familiar with this woman and obviously knew she sold alcoholic drinks at this place. Then the people understood that it was not because he was interested in the best route to take us home that he chose this route, he only wanted to buy this alcoholic drink back to his base, so he took us all along. The

people in the bus said in pidgin English, "Ehen! So driver you get plans." That is how the heart is. It doesn't lead you to good places and you won't know until you're there. The heart is sometimes the driver and you its passengers. Following your heart can never lead you to God.

Another thing not to follow is your feelings. Some say follow what makes you happy. The feelings does not also lead us to places that are good. If we were to follow our feelings we'd find ourselves more involved in fights, quarrels and a whole lot of problems. Children who follow their feelings without any being able to guide them end up destroying themselves. But those who follow what the experience and wisdom of their parents teach them would excel in life, and the wisdom of the experienced is that a good life is a life of self denial. When we follow our feelings we'd find ourselves going after the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, which are inimical to God (1 John 2:15-16), for these lusts do feel good.

Picture the woman looking for her spouse and asking the watchmen, but she doesn't know him (for some reason) then she finds this other man and because of the imagination of her heart goes home with him thinking he was indeed her spouse. That is what our hearts, feelings, and imaginations will lead us to. As we have noted earlier, many, seeking after God without the aid of the light of Christ have concluded that the sun and other objects around us are gods and so worship them. Trying to know God by assuming our imaginations and feelings can lead us to some tangible knowledge about him, rather than relying on the aid of his word and Holy Ghost, is like groping in darkness. You can't find God by these means.

Faith As Opposed To The Imaginations

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."
(Hebrews 11:6)

Finding God in reality requires faith. For one manifest fact about God is that he's unseen. No one has ever seen God. So then how do we go after God who is unseen? The answer is faith. Faith we are told is the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). So we work by this evidence in our walk with God. The same Hebrews 11:1 says faith is the substance of things hoped for. This just emphasises the efficacy of the evidence of faith. For when someone says, "this claim is without substance," it means it is without proof. They are just mere words. But faith is not just mere belief or imagination, it is a concrete evidence.

It is written, "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach." (Romans 10:5 - 8). The word of faith is the word by which we ascend to heaven as easy as we ascend a stairs.

I've written a full book on it titled, "FAITH: The Evidence Of Things Not Seen," and it is free for downloads and I recommend it to the reader. So I won't wish to delve so much into that. But

we must be sure that it is only by faith that we can come to God. The imaginations and feelings must be shut out. Not only are they useless, they can impede the wondrous work of faith. Now how is this faith gotten? It is written, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17). So hearing the word of God is what brings about faith. This brings us to our next point.

Seeking God In His Word

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."
(John 5:39)

Now where do we search for God? Where may we find him? Jesus gave the answer succinctly saying, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39). We do not wish to argue here if Jesus Christ is God or not, for this is not a matter of disputation amongst true Christians. But whosoever finds Christ finds God, and for this reason, it is in the pages of scriptures that we are to go in search of God. By it we find faith that leads us to him. If we seek him diligently, there we shall no doubt find him. This is the most important thing of all I'll mention here about seeking God. For the Bible is a light by which we may search around as well as the very place where we may find him ever present. It is written, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105). It is also written in Psalms 43:3, "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to

thy tabernacles." It is in the light of the scriptures that we can find our way to the holy hill and tabernacle of God.

When you love someone, you most definitely would wish to spend time with that person and know more about him/her. But when you wish to know more about them, how do you do it? In our days, the social media is a good place to start in finding out about people. But if you wish to know somebody as he is without misjudgements, what do you do? Some may go flipping through the person's photos but that is often misleading. A picture, they say, speaks a thousand words, meaning it talks too much and probably tells a lot of lies too. Someone may have had a hectic day and taking a photo in such a state, having a red eye, you conclude that he's such a mean bad guy. But when you go close in reality you'd figure out he's such a gentle, good, and understanding person. I took a photo of my niece and my nephew once, they were so small that I had to sit them down for the photo and they couldn't even sit right when I had placed them on the sofa, but when I took the photo you'd think they were brawling for the cheese balls in their hands. That photo told a big a lie. So photos, though they have the potential of telling detailed stories, can be very deceiving. Thank God we know that God has not been seen and cannot be seen. This informs us that we cannot by seeing have any knowledge of God seeing he's out of our sight.

So what is the best thing to do if you wish to make accurate findings about someone? Listen to their words. That is how to know people accurately without misjudging them. At a time one of my cousins was preparing to get married, I was so happy for him as I felt his marriage was well overdue. I had not met the lady before, but once I got to know her name, I got on the social media and searched for her profile. It was not by looking

at her photos I got to know about who she was but by reading her posts. I realised she was a self-motivational type of person. When we later got to meet, I was absolutely right. Please give me a round of applause.

There is also a foolish practice in my part of the world which is judging people by their looks. When they see a person they assess him by his clothes, shoes, car (they call it ride), and what have you. And they judge a man's competence or ability to deliver by these things. But what if everything he is putting on and using were all borrowed down to even his smile? If you really need to know a person, you can only succeed in knowing him truly by sitting down with him and hearing the words of his mouth. Whether or not he is honest in his utterances doesn't matter. When you hear him talk you would know the man.

If you really love God, you would most definitely wish to know him more and more, and to do that you have to read more and more of his posts. His posts are in the Bible. You can read them there without misjudging God. This is where to find him and this is where all that love him delights to dwell. The love for God in their hearts makes us never get tired of reading his posts. It is of such people that it is written, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the "scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." (Psalm 1:1 - 2). David, who is such a person that loves God, also testified, "Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law." (Psalm 119:70). It is not possible to love God and not delight in reading his word, to know more about him, and to search for him with the whole of the heart. If you find yourself reluctant to know more about God, then something may be wrong with your love. Examine

yourself and consider if there's any way you may need to be reconciled to God.

Seeking God In The Place Of Prayer

"And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes."
(Daniel 9:3)

Prayer is the next most important thing we must mention when it comes to seeking God. We have seen that we can find God in his word, but as we go in search of him it must be done prayerfully. Such prayer would be best accompanied by fasting too. The text above was Daniel's confession. He said he set his face unto God, and how did he seek his face? By prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. We all know Daniel and the bountiful manifestations of God's revelations and presence he witnessed, all that could not have been possible without these, prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. Sackcloth and ashes refer to contrition which we shall speak about much later.

Samuel Rutherford wrote in one of his letters, "... it were good to come oft into terms of speech with God, both in prayer and hearing of the word. For this is the house of wine, where ye meet with your Well-Beloved." Indeed, the place of prayer and study of God's word, not Jerusalem, is the house of wine where we meet our sweet Jesus. We build our relationship with God on our knees.

One of the first things God let me know when I got converted was how attentive he was to my prayers. On one instance, while I prayed on our balcony one night a black bird perched on the roof of our house and started making a whole lot of noise which distracted me from my prayer. I prayed to God to drive the bird away. It was with wonder I watched as the bird immediately flew away. I wondered how that God would listen to such a simple prayer and answer with such immediacy. But it didn't go far. It landed on the roof of the next building and continued making its noise. I thought God didn't answer my prayer after all. But as I tried to continue praying in spite of the noise a white bird came from nowhere ramming into the black bird with its head and knocked it off the roof. The black bird fell downwards like a rock but before it touched the ground it regained its balance. And again it was with wonder as I watched as the white bird chased the black bird completely out of sight, and there was a great silence. Wonder filled my heart that night to realise that God does listen to my prayers and answer them. On many other occasions by dreams and other means he showed me how attentive he was to my prayers and how swift he is to answer. This encouraged me to draw to him often in prayer, and here, in the place of prayer, I found him always. And here I knew him better and here I grew spiritually. Here I found all the things pilgrims would never find on a pilgrimage.

“But suppose my wishes were poor," says Samuel Rutherford, "He is not poor." There is no end of the good things that God can give to us. I'm not a fan of writing about the great and wondrous things God can do for us, and I have two main reasons for this. First there is no end to it so what's the point talking about it. Second is that it would be, as we have noted, a whorish love to love him for the things that he can give to us rather than for himself. I believe it our duty to spur each other

on in loving service than spend the precious hours of our gatherings together or private readings to be focusing and fantasising on the great things he can do. So since he's no poor God we pray to, he can give us as much as we request. So he can give us as much of his presence as we request for. And as chaste spouses, let it be more and more of his presence we crave.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine of Hippo says, "This same Holy Ghost the bishop [referring to Bishop Ambrose of Milan] expressly mentioned when he reminds us that He is to be obtained by prayer." All the fullness of God can only be attained through prayer. Whether it be his presence, Holy Ghost and power to live a righteous life and for service. Everything can be gotten from him.

We will bring this section of this chapter on prayer to an end seeing that the focus is on the role of prayer to knowing God. It can't be dispensed with. Not just a casual prayer, but to know God well we must live a life of ever spending quality time with God in sincere and earnest prayer. We shall talk about other aspects of prayer later or in another book.

Seeking God In The Places Of His Business

"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?"
(Song of Solomon 1:7)

"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."
(John 12:26)

Our God is not a God of idleness and so we must seek him in the place of his business. Christ told us plainly where to find him. He says where he is, that is where his servants will be. He describes them as servants because they are in his service having first said if any serve him let him follow him. We also find God and his Christ in the places of his business.

When Naomi wanted to get a husband for her daughter in law, Ruth, she knew she had to send her to his field, and it was there, when she had come, that he set her eyes on her. It was there she was privileged to come into his presence and enjoyed all the goodness that followed. The same way, when we find ourselves busy, minding those things that are his, we shall experience him richly and enjoy all of his goodness and love.

When we see the things that are God's we often find him in the process and know him more deeply. When we seek the things that are his we come by him more often and sometimes without effort. The lover in Song of Solomon 1:7 quoted above sought to know where her lover feeds his sheep, for it is in the place of his business that she shall find him more often. She also presented this as a mark of chastity, "for," said she, "why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" So, in our search for God, and as a mark of our chastity towards him, we ought to be ever busy in the business of God.

In my book, THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME, I claimed that it is best that women don't work for other people

citing the verse in Job which says, "If mine heart have been deceived by a woman, or if I have laid wait at my neighbour's door; Then let my wife grind unto another, and let others bow down upon her. For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges." (Job 31:9 - 11). Grinding is a domestic service, but a service all the same. Rendering service to another man was to Job a punishable and heinous crime, and he said this should happen to him if he himself had gone after another woman or covetous of his neighbour's wife. Now this verse also supports that claim. To the woman in the Songs of Solomon, it was wrong to be turning aside to the sheep of another other than her spouse. I hope we take this very seriously. Women striving to work in organisations not owned by their husbands, thus serving other men should be seen as doing what it is. A wrong deed.

Little Lord Jesus was busy in his Father's business at the age of twelve. It is written, "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). And all his life was he occupied in his business. It is written, "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." (John 5:17). How shall they who do little or nothing for God's sake consider themselves worthy to be called by that wondrous name of Christ. The name Christian is a weighty one and not many are worthy of it. But as many as love God indeed would naturally seek the things that are God's.

We have a commandment from Christ which says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33). When we seek the things that are God's, his kingdom and his righteousness, all other things, including his abiding presence, shall be added to us. And when we fail to be in his loving service we but disobey.

Colossians 3:1 says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." It is part of our principal Christian calling to seek the things which are above. Not just God alone but everything heavenly. So while we seek God, we must seek those things that are his for in this we find him more easily. Yet, if we have such a calling, to seek things above, how much more should we seek God himself? And our earnest search for God should lead us to seek the things that are his.

As we have seen, the Bible is key in our search for God. All the things that God does are spelt out there. And this is how it becomes a light for us as we seek to be engaged in the things that are God's. I'll just mention few things that our God does so we can know the fields where we can find him ever up to something and so join him to enjoy his sweet presence.

God is in the business of sanctifying us. So the major thing we should focus on should be to be engaged in making ourselves holy. I know a set of pesky people we have amidst us would wish to find fault with these writings as being too focused on works whereas grace should be prominent in Christian writings and teachings, but I find most absurd the arguments of people who speak against teaching on works, indeed I find it dumb. Why should we be focused on the things that God does and ignore our own responsibilities to him? Grace is God's part of our salvation work, but we have our own parts to play too, which of course can only be done by the same grace. Our focus ought to be on works and not on grace. In a football team where the manager is perfect, it is foolishness for the players to leave off training and be more interested in how wonderful the manager's tactics are or can be. The training makes good players

and tactics make a good team, and a good team gets goals and results. Every player is to devote himself to training and allow the manager come up with his tactics. One of the verses that makes it clear that we have work to do is, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour." (1 Thessalonians 4:3 - 4). This sanctification is based on both our knowing how to possess our vessel in sanctification and doing it. So let's be clear on that. God is the manager, but we are the players. Everything relies on him, he could bench you with all your skills, and he could field a less skilled player and still get his results, but a good player would always do his best for both his club and manager.

I get sick when I sit down and hear a preacher strenuously teaching about grace and how forgiven we are. As good as that is, teaching about good works and how to do them is far more important than those. Even if those are to be preached, it should be preached in ways that encourage good works. It must still come to this: good works. So we have our part to play in making ourselves holy, relying on his grace. We shall talk more about this in later chapters.

Apart from seeking to be holy and seeking our spiritual progress, Amos 5:14-15 says, "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph." The instructions we find here are to seek good and not evil, to hate evil and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate. And the promise is, "and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you." God is

ever in the business of these things, that is doing and loving good and hating evil, and there is the promise that when we do this too he shall be with us. And when we have him with us, the purpose of our search shall always be met. Our work should not be limited to seeking good in ourselves and church, we must also seek good in our societies. That is what is meant by "... establish judgment in the gate."

I get sad when I see Christians not the least bothered about the societies they live in. They think it is not their business. But ignoring our societies and its moral state is far from what God wants from us. God wants us to start by seeking good in ourselves, then seeking good in the church, and also seeking good in our societies. It is foolishness to ignore the moral uprightness of our societies for we live in it and our children grow in it. Whatever we teach our children at home and at church would be destroyed in a corrupt society. We can't be good Christians if we let our societies sink into decay and moral corruption. That is not the main issue in this book, but let's be clear that we, as Christians, must actively seek a role to play in ensuring our societies are morally upright, and play that role diligently. We shall find God more when we do these things.

Malachi 2:7 says, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." One of the major problems the church is facing is that it has leaders that don't seek God. If the church shall be healthy, it is imperative that every one Christian person seek the Lord, for we all are his priests. We should seek the law, meaning that which should govern our lives, at his mouth. And the words of his mouth can be found in the Holy Bible.

God is also in the business of edifying and uniting his church. Amongst the hosts of verses that speaks of how we ought to edify one another and how this is God's will, we find these verses, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11 - 13). God is in the business of all these. And we also have a host of verses that talk about how God desires the perfect unity of his church. In fact I've written a full book on the unity of the church titled "UNITY IN PURITY." You can find it on my website (ayomikun.com.ng). We can't exhaust the list of things that God is actively engaged in of which if we should join him in those things we shall find and come by him more often. So let us be ever actively busy in edifying and unifying the church in the purity of his word.

If we must experience the best of God, we must find him in the place of his business. You can look around and see more of the businesses of God in which we would always find him and draw up your own list. Seeking him in the place of his business should be as a result of our longing for him as well as a mark of our chastity, of which both our longing for him and our chastity are marks of love.

As we have said in the previous chapter, it is very possible to make an idol of even the sweetness of the fellowship with him. The same way it is possible for our love for him to grow completely cold and lukewarm while fervent in the service of God. This happens when we are more interested in service than in spending time with him in the reading of his word and in

personal prayer. We must be careful never to pursue the things that are God's at the expense of himself.

Here is a hymn by Henry H. Barstow (in The Presbyterian Tribune, circa 1936):

"The Son of Man goes forth today
With slow and toilsome pace,
By hedge and curb, in mine and wood,
The shepherdless to trace;
Through gleaming square and alley dim,
High hall and basement low,
Where goes the Son of Man today
Let those who serve Him go.

The Son of Man goes forth today,
His eyes suffused with pain,
Where children's toil and virtue's worth
Are marketed for gain.
On them, in wrath 'gainst ruthless greed
He lays the millstone's woe:
Where goes the Son of Man today
Let those who serve Him go.

The Son of Man goes forth today,
Up Calvary's rocky slope;
His ancient wounds gush forth afresh,
Mankind's eternal hope.
O Church of God, behold the Man!
Your Lord and pattern know!
Where goes the Son of Man today
Let those who serve Him go."

May God help us in this holy endeavour. Amen.

Remaining Steadfast In His Presence

"... I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go..."
(Song of Solomon 3:4)

"And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."
(Exodus 33:15)

It is the beauty of love that once a person finds the object of his or her love he won't want to ever let him or her go. While we cannot lay hold upon God like the woman in the Songs of Solomon, or like Moses who spoke to him indicating that they won't depart if he didn't go with them, we can at least endeavour to carry about the sweetness of his presence with us. We can cultivate an intimate relationship with God and maintain it.

We can easily do this by doing everything we find ourselves doing with him by taking him along as a guide and friend. It is written, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5 - 6). So hold God in your heart in all you do and in everywhere you go.

It is easy to assume that we have the presence of God only during our quiet time, in prayer, or in church, but we take him

with us everywhere we go. When we leave the place of prayer we don't throw God behind our backs and go into the business of the day. We step into the world with him. Though we have left the place of prayer, by the disposition of our heart and consciousness of our minds, we remain steadfastly in his presence.

In my book, "THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME," I explained that chastity demands that we set a seal to our hearts quoting the verse that says, "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." (Song of Solomon 8:6). So the chaste love we have for God demands that we set him as a seal upon our hearts and arms, which means we take him everywhere with us bearing him upon our hearts and arms and to think on him always. Everywhere we go we ought to continuously ensure that we are conscious of his omnipresent presence and act accordingly.

As Moses said, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." (Exodus 33:15). Do not progress in life or service to God without his presence. Tarry until you have the riches of his presence then proceed with that presence. Go forth and prevail.

LeRoy Moore wrote a hymn in 1897 with these words,

"At the noontide, while we labor
In this world of care,
Let us feel Thy holy presence,
With us everywhere;
Teaching us the precious lessons,
As we journey on;

Filling us with peace and gladness,
Till the day is done."

We shall see more on this matter in the chapter on THE STEADFAST GODWARD GAZE.

Seeking To Be With God In Eternity

"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."
(Philippians 1:23)

Now, the earnestness with which we wish to see God must not end with the desire to experience him richly here on earth, but we must have that earnest desire to be joined with him for all eternity. I mean we should look forward, not to die, but to the day of our departure from this life. The day appointed by him. This rules out suicide completely, for suicide is self murder of which no murderer shall inherit the kingdom of God. But there is a day appointed by God for each man to die, with joy we should look forward to that day and live with the consciousness that with each passing day we approach nearer to it.

Also we must not be such as desire to die. It does not speak well of our testimony even to be of a sad and withdrawn countenance, not to mention actually seeking to die. In the book, "Way-Marks" compiled by The Right Reverend Gregory Townsend (1793-1834), he wrote;

"There is a class of christians who appear taciturn, unsocial, and even sad. This appearance is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of religion. Christians ought to appear cheerful and happy; to appear to receive with pleasure and gratitude all the lawful enjoyments bestowed by their Heavenly Father. Such a gloomy deportment as has been described, does not do honour to religion, and causes those whom we wish to win to the ways of pleasantness and peace, to feel that religion is a melancholy, unsocial, and forbidding subject.

All professors of religion should endeavour to have such views of God, his love, his providence, his care; and should so live, as to be cheerful and happy, and to appear so.

On the contrary, there is a class of professed christians, who indulge in frequent trifling and levity. This is quite as inconsistent and injurious as the former, and if any thing it is more so. Let the christian at least, learn to make a distinction between cheerfulness and levity. Remember we are commanded to avoid foolish talking and jesting, and that it is possible to be happy, cheerful, affable, and kind without any trifling or levity."

I think there is a good balance between Christian cheerfulness and levity here. While Christians are called to be sober, we are also called to rejoice (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Such rejoicing must not be such as would be averse to our soberness. The Christian life sometimes requires balancing and holding two seemingly opposite things. Here we see soberness and rejoicing. When we lay hold of both in temperance we shall see what fine persons we will become.

John Owen, a Puritan who I thought would favour the idea of loving death and gloominess, wrote, "[The Roman Catholics'] preachings, sermons, and books of devotion, all look this way. Hence, those who interpret the locusts that came out of the bottomless pit, Rev. ix. 3, to be the friars of the Romish church, who are said to torment men, so "that they should seek death and not find it," verse 6, think that they did it by their stinging sermons, whereby they convinced them of sin, but being not able to discover the remedy for the healing and mortifying of it, they kept them in such perpetual anguish and terror, and such trouble in their consciences, that they desired to die. This, I say, is the substance and glory of their religion." I found this statement of his to be very funny, and the effect it had on me was that of going to someone you think is an ascetic to seek support for an ideal only to have him poke fun at that ideal. That coming from him, I felt embarrassed for holding the thought that desiring death was such a glorious thing. I laughed at how he likened this thing I thought was religious fervour to be the effect of being stung by the locust from the bottomless pit. He got me there big time. So seeking death because of what is perceived as the misery of this world is very contrary to what we as Christians should be doing. As if God had placed us here as a mark of wickedness towards us and that our relationship with him in this world should seem as that of a woman married to a wife beating husband. When through sanctification our consciences have been set free, the effect should be cheerfulness, yet with temperance.

I myself have been in circumstances, and this is often, that I start praying that I die. Maybe due to frustration because things aren't going the way I wanted them to, or because of one unpleasant thing or the other. When I'm in a more proper mind I tend to see myself as a spoilt child of God that would cry over

everything and even wish to die merely to avoid little discomforts. But those times are usually very painful and death seems to be the quickest way out of the present pain. At one of such times I read from Every Day With Jesus in which the author, Dr. Selwyn Hughes of blessed memory, explained why God allows us to remain in this earth despite being saved. Many insightful things were said, but the bottom line is, we have a lot to do for God here. So why should a faithful and dutiful servant be seeking to leave his masters field to enter an eternal rest? So we must look forward to the day of our departure, not because we are lazy servants who don't want to work, not because this world is full of misery and gloom, not because we are spoilt brats who don't want to face any unpleasantness, but our earnestness with which we look forward for our departure should be on the grounds of our love for him alone. So we have to be careful and look carefully at the inward motions of our hearts to ensure that we look forward to our departure for the right reason and in the right way.

This was why Paul wrote, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again."(Philippians 1:23 - 26). He has the desire to depart, not because he's afraid of getting more of the strokes, shipwrecks and other unpleasantness he had experienced in the past. No, he wanted to depart to be with Christ. Yet because it is needful for the Christian church for him to remain, meaning he still has works to do for God, he was desirous and confident that he will remain in the flesh.

That said, now to the point. It is quite sad that the thought of death troubles many Christians. While we shouldn't desire death, the thought of it ought to gladden us. For we go to be with our love. In a case where we find ourselves so scared of death we ought to know there is a breakage in our relationship with God. Something is not right. We need to examine ourselves to know exactly what is wrong and amend our ways. The thought of death, apart from the thought of pain it would cause our family, friends, and loved ones, ought to gladden our hearts. But people experience terrors regarding the departure from this world itself. That's a very pitiful thing.

Thomas à Kempis wrote in his book "The Imitations of Christ," “The saints of God and all loyal friends of Christ held as nothing the things which pleased the flesh, or those which flourished in this life, but their whole hope and affection aspired to the things which are above. Their whole desire was borne upwards to everlasting and invisible things, lest they should be drawn downwards by the love of things visible.” Carnality causes fear of death. When we love this world so much that the thought of departing from it causes us so much pain and despair, it shows that we are carnal. It shows how much we love this world more than Jesus our love.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, “I bless my God that there is a death, and a heaven.” Yes, there is a heaven, for this we bless God. The way to it must be through death, so must we bless God for it and gladly go through this death to be with Christ. So to the Christian in good standing, death does not have the power to cause fear or pain. That is why we could boast saying, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

(1 Corinthians 15:55 - 57). We see here that the sting of sin is death. The man that has overcome sin by the grace of God and is reconciled to God can't feel the pain of this sting.

It is also written, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1). Let us evermore both seek the things which are above, where Christ is, and also look forward to being with him ourselves. If we seek the things which are above, we would have little or no reason to fear death.

Even if the deep love for Christ weren't there, the greatness of the treasures we have in heaven ought to make us earnestly look forward to the day when we shall depart out of this life. I passed by a luxurious estate which is under construction as I write. As I passed by it everyday and the name of the company largely displayed on a signboard, I became curious as to what the company was all about. This was before the development started. I decided to google about the company and I discovered that it was a company developing a number of luxurious estates in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. I was amazed when I went through the types of residential buildings they were developing. They had basements and about three floors. I wondered what sort of humans would wish to live in such luxurious buildings. You probably wouldn't want to go to work any more. And that I suppose is the recipe for failure even if you've succeeded before. Well, I'm not a fan of excessively large buildings. As I expressed in my book on the Christian home, they tend to reduce family interaction to a very great extent. So I'm not a fan of what I saw and did feel some level of irritation. Those buildings were really grand and luxurious, and they're probably going to be bought by humans. It made me wonder about the huge amount of money that would be used in developing those buildings and

the huger amount that would be used in buying them.

But let's just pretend that that is the desire of all hearts and something really worth looking forward to in this life, so imagine being promised such a house with fleets of luxurious cars (still pretending). One for you, another for your spouse, a third for the children who would be driven by a driver, another to take your dog for washing to be driven by another driver, and several others just to taste the pleasure of automobiles and all expenses to be paid for by your country. But at the moment you just have a modest job with a modest salary to afford a little house with just a bedroom, bathroom and a kitchen. The promise is that the moment you retire (for whatever reason and whatever time) you shall own this property and all the benefits that come with it. But you mustn't get fired and you mustn't resign. You shall leave the job at an appointed time. Would you not look forward to the day when the time to leave the job shall be due? I believe it shall be with so much excitement and earnest anticipation. We shall work each day with joy and sweet shall be our anticipation (still pretending). But this is so little compared to the promise that awaits us upon our departure from this world. We can't commit suicide for that would be sin, and we shouldn't desire death for that would be bad for our testimony. But if we are conscious of the wondrous riches laid up in store for us, we would earnestly anticipate the time of leaving this world to our eternal home in heaven.

But let us have a little glimpse of what the Bible says about what is laid up for us in eternity. I shared this in my book, "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE", but it is worth sharing here too. It is written, "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the

earth shall wring them out, and drink them." (Psalm 75:8). Now take all the wealth owned by the wicked (and most extremely rich people are wicked seeing they have no regard for God) and examine it carefully. Google could be of great help in this. You'd see incredible properties and assets of vast amounts and grandeur, yachts, private jets and all, yet these are not all. You cannot even come close to knowing a bit of the wealth owned by the wicked. But the Bible tells us that all those are but dregs. Most people who come from wealthy homes won't know what dregs are or how it feels to taste it. But I do. When you wring out the dregs of a drink it only makes you miserable. When you do, you'd have the taste of the drink on your tongue, but there's really nothing more than a faint taste of the drink. It does not satisfy. I suppose that is why no amount of wealth here below can really satisfy any man, because as huge as it may be, it is but dregs. That dregs is what you see the wicked owning and living on and are so happy that they've got wealth. But the real wine is above, preserved for the righteous. So if the wealth of the wicked of this world is but dregs, it shows how great the wealth of the righteous is. Shall any knowing of the wealth reserved for him in eternity be saddened by the thought of leaving this world? Such sadness could only come by means of spiritual blindness.

Ada R. Habershon (1861–1918) wrote a beautiful hymn that is excellent for self examination. The first verse goes:

"Are you ready for the coming
Of the Lord from Heav'n?
Are you resting in the promise
Which to us is giv'n?
Does your heart leap up with rapture
As you know He's near?

Or do thoughts of His appearing
Fill your heart with fear?"

The earnestness with which you desire to leave this world is a litmus test to the state of your soul. By it you can examine if or not you're prepared to be with the Lord when he returns. If the thought of leaving this world fills your heart with fear, then examine further, there are things in your life that can disqualify you from being granted entry into eternal bliss. Prayerfully seek those things out and prayerfully do something about them while there's still time to do something about them. If your heart leaps with joy at the thought of Christ's return, then you're likely set to enter into his eternal rest. However, it does not mean that one should be complacent. Even in this state, we must be careful and ensure that we are consistently examining our hearts to seek out those things that may displease God and thus deny us entry into his eternal rest. So the thought of leaving this world ought to gladden us. The upright man is ever gladdened by this. But the sinner and the spiritually blind would be troubled by this thought.

However, the love for Christ, and not these things alone, ought to be the major reason why we ought to anticipate our departure from this world to our eternal home. Just as not looking forward to the day of our departure is a mark that we are carnal, looking forward to these things without looking forward to being with Christ and his holy saints is still yet a form of carnality. Let's not love Jesus our Lord with such adulterous love, but let's love him with a sincere heart. True love says, "I want you not yours" (1 Corinthians 12:14).

Reward For The Diligent

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."
(Hebrews 11:6)

"... I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain..."
(Isaiah 45:19)

Now, is there a benefit for going after God, or is there a consequence for not doing so? Yes, there are. We must have this understanding to respond rightly to faith. We are told in the verse above that without faith it is impossible to please God. Then it goes on to say that before one can come to God he must first believe that he is. It didn't just stop there, for one to come to God he must also believe, having this right understanding, that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. So to please God we must believe this. How he rewards is beyond what I understand or can enumerate and explain, but it is a guarantee and there's no pleasing God without holding this conviction.

As we've quoted before the verse that says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13). The achievement of finding God is based on a diligent search for him. Note the word "when," meaning finding him is upon the condition of a diligent search for him. To think we can find God by a casual search or that we just bump into him on our way to the ice cream shop is to be greatly deceived.

Again to the hymn of Frances Ridley Hevergal which goes,

"Half-hearted, false-hearted! Heed we the warning!
Only the whole can be perfectly true;
Bring the whole offering, all timid thought scorning,
Truehearted only if whole-hearted too."

Halfhearted is false-hearted, for half truth is complete falsehood. To seek God with the half of the heart is to seek him with a false heart. For only the whole can be perfectly true. Searching for God with a false heart would definitely yield no result.

Don't assume that God is satisfied with a Christian who will seek for him with only the half of his heart. No! In the verse above, God clearly gave the condition of finding him saying "when ye shall search for me with all your heart." All of the heart and nothing else will do. The reward is great. "And ye shall... find me." Glory! Hallelujah! When talking of that residing manifest presence of the Most High, we can only have it through a diligent search for him.

There are many other benefits we can see in scriptures for seeking God. Let us look at some of the verses of scriptures that inform us on these benefits. Here are some benefits.

Lamentations 3:25 says, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him."

Psalms 34:10 says, "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

Amos 5:4 says, "For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live:"

Zephaniah 2:3 says, "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger."

Jeremiah 30:21-22 says, "And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Lastly let's look at a verse from Amos, "Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel." (Amos 5:6). There is both a reward of seeking him wholeheartedly, and there are dire consequences of not doing so. May God help us all to choose and act aright. Amen.

While our focus is ascending into God's manifest presence and the benefit of experiencing his manifest presence (which is guaranteed by a sure promise that shall be granted us when we seek him with all of the heart) is what is of concern to us at the moment, seeking God diligently has other immense benefits. Let us allow our hearts to be filled with the love for God and allow that love compel us to go out in a diligent search for him. And so shall our lives be blessed beyond all expectations.

Let's round off this chapter with this hymn verse by John Burton, Jr. (1803–1877):

"O if we love Him as we ought,
And on His grace rely,

We shall be joyful at the thought
That God is always nigh."

Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord and rewarder of all those who diligently seek you, give us a heart that loves you and pursues after you everywhere you may be found. Let us be consumed by your love and our love for you. And as we seek you diligently, may we be greatly rewarded in life and in death. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 13: HOW TO SEEK GOD

"... the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order."
(1 Chronicles 15:13)

Now that we know where to find God and the importance of diligently seeking him, we need to know how to find him too. In the verse above David said God made a breach on them because, though they sought him, they sought him not after the due order. To have a rewarding quest after God, we need to know how to seek him, and knowing it, seek him rightly. In this chapter we're going to look at that together.

Humility Of Heart

"Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken."
(Jeremiah 13:15)

"... be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."
(1 Peter 5:5)

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble."
(James 4:6)

He who seeks God must seek him with humility of heart. He who has an haughty heart should not expect to find God. Yea, God indeed resists such for how shall they find God when he himself resists them? When they approach God with such a heart he shuts the door against them. As Dr. Selwyn Hughes of blessed memories says, "... those who approach the Bible with a proud heart and know-all attitude will find it firmly shut and it will not reveal anything to them." When Daniel said he sought the face of God with sackcloth and ashes, that signified humility, penitence, and the anguish of broken heartedness and he found God and enjoyed his presence richly. It is he who seeks God with a humble heart that shall find him.

Humility entails many things, but chief among them are;

1. Humility entails having a humble view of one's self. This means not seeing yourself as being so upright and in good and high standing in God's commandments.
2. This also follows that one should be willing to accept that he's wrong. For one mark of pride is the inability to accept one's wrongdoings.

Pride is a trait that should never be seen in the life of any true and professing Christian. Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, "... men walk not so arrogantly in the Way, which the Humble

Christ taught that He Himself is.” So if Jesus is the Way, and we as Christians walk by that Way, how can we say we are Christians and walk in pride. To walk in pride means we are not in the Way. It means we are out of the Way.

Jesus also says of himself, "... I am meek and lowly in heart..." (Matthew 11:29). Being a Christian is being Christ-like, so how shall they who are supposed to be like Christ be proud and vain? That is possessing qualities which are so averse to the nature of Christ. To have pride is to be un-Christ-like and so un-Christian. And is even anti-Christian and Antichristly. If Christ be meek and lowly and enjoyed the fullness of God's presence, then he that comes to God must of necessity be meek and lowly in heart.

Apart from this, Augustine of Hippo also wrote, “Vanity is a disease especially of those who mislead themselves, and “think themselves to be something, when they are nothing.”" It is really a disease and when we examine ourselves and discover pride of any level in us, we must deal with it quickly as we would a disease. And when we find it evidently in others (that is not sniffing it out) we should also treat them like diseased people and the right response is to isolate them.

Pride is also a mark that we are self deceived. For we come from dust and to dust we return. All we are and have is given to us by God. And so it is simple wisdom to be humble. This is why bishop Cyprian of Carthage says, “we must boast in nothing, since nothing is our own.” And to this agrees scriptures which says, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). There's nothing we have that was not

given to us of either God or men. So it is foolish to become proud on their account. And again, "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand." (Ecclesiastes 5:15). So pride is a clear mark of blindness and self deceit.

Pride is also very destructive. There is nothing that it is not capable of destroying. Richard Baxter wrote in his book on Christian Politics, "But pride is the gunpowder of the mind, the family, the church, and state; it maketh men ambitious, and setteth them on striving who shall be the greatest." The family in particular is often the victim of the destructive effect of pride.

Pride can also be deceptive. A person may become proud for being humble. He may also seek vain praise from men for his humble acts. That, I say, is being humble in a proud way or being proud in a humble way. So, one can, in seeking to be humble, still be susceptible to pride.

Seeing that pride is so averse to the ways of Christ, it is anti-Christian to allow it in our members. Seeing that it is a disease, we must seek to cure it at every point we discover it in our lives. Seeing it is deceit, let us not fool ourselves and practice deceit in allowing ourselves to think that we are something when we are nothing, for God hates those that practice deceit. It is written, "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man." (Psalm 5:6). And seeing it is destructive, let us not allow anything in our lives that will make us destroyers. This shall make us like the Devil and not like Christ, for it is written, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

(John 10:10). Let us maintain a meek and lowly spirit like our Lord Christ.

The proud shall not see God even though he thinks in his heart that he's seeking him with the whole of his heart. God must be sought with a heart of humility. There's none who is proud that shall abide in the presence of God. Let us seek him with a humble heart.

On a final note, to show God's passion for the humble it is written, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Isaiah 57:15). God loves the meek and lowly dearly.

Sincerity Of Heart And Honesty

"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."
(Luke 8:1)

A honest and good heart is necessary for a successful walk with God. God is to be sought with a honest and good heart. Not a self deceiving and hypocritical heart. Lack of sincerity is a major obstacle to being able to approach God. This is not just the mere insincerity of the lips but the insincerity of the heart. One can be honest with the tongue but insincere in the heart. This

insincerity, if allowed to be, shall pose a major militating factor against our walk with God. In the verse above, Jesus after speaking a parable about the seed and the sower to the multitude explained it to his disciples in private. After narrating the ill fate of the seed sown in a bad soil, he went on to tell them about the seed that was sown in a good soil. He said such "are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Key to the success of such a seed is seen in the words, "honest and good heart."

Without a sincere, honest, and good heart men shall scarcely find God though they seek him much. A person must have a sincere heart and tell himself the truth if he must find God. This entails sincerity and honesty with others, sincerity and honesty with one's self, and sincerity and honesty with God. When I say sincerity and honesty with others I don't need to explain what that means because we all know. It simply means being truthful in words, in deeds, and in motive when dealing with others.

To be true to one's self is being able to speak the truth to one's self. Being able to accept the truth concerning one's self. Insincerity to the self is common when it comes to accepting bitter truths. But he that wishes to find God must not be such that denies the truth about himself simply because the truth is bitter. For example, for strange reasons women don't wish to cover their heads when praying. It is not like it requires unpleasant rigour to do that. It is simple and even beautiful for ladies to have their heads covered even when not praying, but somehow they simply hate to do it. Then they argue that what the Bible meant by the covering of the head is the hair of the woman. But that, my brethren, is about the height of insincerity. The dubiousness of their heart is seen firstly in the fact that they

make complex that which is simple. A child, in the sincerity and simplicity of his heart, who reads the passage containing the command that women ought to cover their heads when praying (1 Corinthians 11:5-10) would easily understand that it meant an actual covering, such as head scarf, veil, etc. and not the hair. But the older people who ought to know better, having developed a dubious heart and being insincere to themselves, try to make the simple sound so complex. Their insincerity is even seen to be worse when one considers that their argument is easily refuted by the same passage, for if the hair was the covering the Bible referred to, when it says men ought not to cover their head when praying (1 Corinthians 11:4), it therefore means that it is a sin for men to pray with their head unshaven. For this reason, if their argument were true, then all Christian men ought to look like Stonecold Steve Austin or worse, at least when praying. And when not praying they fix back their hairs if they so choose. The absurdity of their argument is easily seen when one considers this, but such people would never see it that way. I wrote a full chapter on this issue in my book titled, "OUR HOLY CHRISTIAN DRESSING TRADITIONS AND APPEARANCE."

This is about the major evidence of the prevalent lack of sincerity in the church of today. The fact that the women who pray and go to church without covering their heads are so many tells you how widespread insincerity has become in the Christian church. There are many other things that people who are insincere to themselves do and say that calls for much concern. Many of them are not being true to themselves when they read their Bibles because they hate its truth as it is not compatible with their desires or pride. It is by the same reason of lack of sincerity to the self that women do also speak, ask questions, and teach in our churches despite the fact that the Bible very

clearly forbids it (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Let not such people who lack the ability to be sincere with themselves think that they can experience the manifest presence of God. For a person or church that teaches their members to be dishonest with themselves to expect to experience God's manifest presence amounts to wishful thinking.

To be true to God entails expressing our true feelings to him. It is understandable, though sad, to see people who would lie to others. But far sadder it is to see people who just can't tell themselves the truth. It is sadder still to see people lying to the all knowing God. Such people should not expect to find him though they spend their time in diligent study of the word of God and in prayer.

One may wonder if and how it were possible to lie to God. The psalmist wrote, "Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant." (Psalm 78:36 - 37). Here we see how people do lie to God. This is a confirmation that we can lie to God though we cannot deceive him.

But how do people lie to him? Lying to God often starts at someone being dishonest with himself and then proceeds to express untrue feelings to God, for example a false loyalty. A false loyalty is what the psalmist referred to as to flatter him with the mouth. Before this the psalmist had said, "When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer." (Psalm 78:34 - 35). They sought God, the way many people are seeking God and his manifest presence today, they recognise who he is, their

rock and redeemer, but all this they did with a dubious heart. Many call Christ Lord, but Christ has no say in how they guide their affairs. They do everything that is averse to Christ and only pay him a lip service.

Isaiah 58:1-2 says, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." Here we see a people who seek God daily, they delight to know his ways (keep in mind the words "as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God"), they ask for ordinances of justice, and delight in approaching after God, as many people today desire to experience the manifest presence of God. All these they did with a dubious heart that is why it says, "as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God." They acted like a righteous people who kept God's ordinance while in truth they did not. I repeat, let not any man who fails to be honest with others, himself, and God think that he shall experience God's manifest presence.

Isaiah confessed saying, "For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood." (Isaiah 59:12 - 13). This is not just lying to God but lying against him. People who obfuscate the simple truths of scriptures and claim the Bible says things that it never said, such as that it is allowed for women to speak in churches, or that we are mandated to give a tenth of

our income to pastors, are lying against God. Every form of such wrong interpretation of scriptures is an act of lying against God. All such people who lie to God and against him will be separated from him in life and in death.

I therefore intreat you, the reader, to examine yourself closely. Are you a sincere person? Are you willing to accept inconvenient or even bitter truths? Examine yourself and see if there are ways you're dodgy about some truths. Are you in any way dubious? Consider these things and make amends where necessary. Choose to be sincere and honest to all men, to yourself and to God. For without this you cannot experience God's manifest presence.

In the book, "Hymns and Spiritual Songs," Isaac Watts wrote these words:

"Lord, search my thoughts, and try my ways,
And make my soul sincere;
Then shall I stand before Thy face,
And find acceptance there."

We must also not be hypocritical to make ourselves look like saints before men, while we are like the Devil within. Richard Baxter wrote, "It is impudent presumption, and not faith, to look to be like the saints in glory, while you are like the devil in malice and cruelty." While there's no point telling everyone about our moral failures, we have to ensure that we don't pretend to be who we are not. There's no benefit in this for it isn't the commendations of men that shall grant us access into heaven. It is the true state of our hearts that shall determine if we shall enter into the blessed eternal rest with Christ. Joseph Hinchsliffe expressed this truth in his hymn (1797) with the following words:

"Most awful truth! and is it so?
Must all the world that harvest know?
Is every man or wheat or tare?
Then for that harvest O prepare!
For soon the reaping time will come,
And angels shout the harvest home.

To love my sins—a saint to appear,
To grow with wheat—yet be a tare,
May serve me while I live below,
Where tares and wheat together grow:
But soon the reaping time will come,
And angels shout the harvest home.

But all who truly righteous be
Their Father's kingdom then shall see;
And shine like suns for ever there:
He that hath ears, now let him hear;
For soon the reaping time will come,
And angels shout the harvest home."

So let no man deceive himself that appearing like a saint would do him any good on that day. Only the truly righteous would be granted entry into that blessed eternal rest.

Being a sinner and yet being sincere to ourselves and God about it is still a good thing. This is what justified the publican above the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14. This is the sincerity God requires from us. A man like this, though a sinner would find God sooner or later and what a fine Christian he shall become for he detests his sin and through labour and grappling with his sin he shall triumph over them. And to his sincerity is one added benefit, he

would be able to help those struggling with sin having had his own experience and now understanding the art of victory over sin would be able, through his experience, help others up.

Back to our theme which is attaining God's presence, God would not grant his presence to any who does not have a sincere heart. Read Psalms 24:3-6. À Kempis Thomas wrote "[To the presence of God] no levity draweth, no curiosity, nor sensuality, only steadfast faith, devout hope, and sincere charity.” If we really wish to experience the riches of God's presence, we must put away all forms of insincerity.

Also, many who leave God leave him because they came to him with ulterior motives, not with a sincere heart. The disciples that came to Jesus, in John6, came in search of bread. Jesus himself said it as it is written, "And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." (John 6:25 - 26). So though they came calling him Rabbi, meaning teacher, as if they sought his doctrine and teachings, but within their hearts they only sought for food. The same way many come after Christ today seeking for the mundane things of this world. Food, wealth, fame, success, etc. But they come to God as if they sought God. As if they wanted to learn of him. They themselves are convinced, being deceived by their deceptive hearts, that these good things of seeking God and his righteousness form their motives, but deep within their hearts, they are not seeking God, neither his kingdom, nor his righteousness. They are only seeking bread. It took Christ who understood the inner motions of the heart to point their hypocrisy out.

Selwyn Hughes shared a story told by a missionary to a remote tribe in south-east Asia, how those who had become Christians taught the missionary the real meaning of grace when they said, "Christianity is the only faith where you can't wangle God to get benefits out of him." They were initially used to a religion where you attempted to cajole, bribe, manipulate, and wangle your god in the hope that he would do you favours. But Christ is not that way and grace does not involve wangling God. But many people still come to him with this heathenish mindset. Sometimes this mindset is created in people who go about to preach the gospel. They think that telling people of wonderful things they can cajole God to do would make them convert that person easily. Yes they do convert them easily but also shabbily. And having first of all thoroughly ruined the soil they intend to plant the seed of the gospel with the foolishness of the error of their preaching, they proceed to plant the seed on a bad soil which cannot produce fruits. This produces Christians with a very wrong perception of God.

But when the people that came to Christ didn't get bread, with the slightest thing he said, they got offended and left him. Usually, to stop walking with someone like that can't be because of just one offence. The first offence came from not getting bread from him. Immediately upon their arrival he let them know he was opposed to them seeking him for the sake of bread. That was the first offence and at this point their whole essence of seeking him was defeated. At this point frustration was already setting in. They who laboured and possibly spent their resources to get to him had realised that it seemed they had just wasted their strength, time, and resources in seeking bread. My! That must have been mighty offensive. But that wasn't all. When after the conversation, in which, among many things, they also tried to lure him to provide bread for them

saying their fathers ate bread in the wilderness. But when nothing was coming forth, they got offended at him again. Their eyes were so fixed on food that the moment he said his body is bread indeed it seems they could literally imagine themselves chewing on his flesh. And after murmuring they left. Why? Because, for the thing they sought Christ for, they had an alternative. They had somewhere else to get bread from, it is just that Christ's source was an easy one. By their expectation it was going to be a manna from heaven experience. "Do nothing and get bread" formula. But now, since the easy one was not coming forth, then they had better go for the harder and surer one, and not waste their time for a free bread that shall never be. That is why they left.

People who come to God with ulterior motives won't go far with him if at all they come to him. There are many that don't see the need of God because they are not poor. They have all that heart could wish for, so what need is there for God? For the thing they seek after, they have no need of Christ. The not so rich ones came to him for manna and left, but those who don't have need of manna, or even have something more sumptuous than manna, probably didn't bother coming. Food is their compass. Because Christ gave them food they started following him around in a hot pursuit. This is how people are today. Seeking God for favour's sake, and when they don't get it they flee. And when they have all they need beyond what fake preachers can promise, they don't bother.

I get amused how deluded preachers go about trying to get people converted or do something they want by telling them of great things which they can get from God. They then go into the business of trying to persuade people that they have problems that need solving, though the person isn't aware of it. One came

to our church which had relatively rich people and started preaching about worldly blessings that they will get from God if they can support a church project financially. When people didn't get excited with all his mundane fantasies he resorted to insulting the people saying things like, "you think you have wealth, that thing you call jeep you're riding is what whites use for transporting woods." So by trying to talk them down he sought to whet their covetousness so as to take advantage of them. And the adverts, banners, and fliers of Christian programs promising these things for attending their crusades and even salvation abounds. For these reasons, true Christians who know their God are extremely scarce. I for one got saved from the shackles of these modern day preachers by bumping into old time preachers who had better things to say. They opened my eyes and warned me against the prevalent absurdities that were to come, prophesying in their own times, but which has now come to be the order of the day today.

But if you come to Christ, do so because you seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This is the right thing for which one is to seek Christ. That is why he said to those food lovers that came after him, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John 6:27). This is the right thing for which to seek Christ. Salvation and consequent eternal life is all a man should strive primarily for and all he should come to Christ for. Other things shall Christ add as he deems fit.

Mind you, it is not wrong to seek bread from God. That is why our Lord's prayer goes, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread..."

(Matthew 6:9 - 11). So we are to seek our bread and other earthly needs from God, but not the way it was sought after by those people whom Christ shunned. Not to be sought after that if you don't get it you'd abandon him if he does not give you what you covet. And it should be your needs you should seek after and not wants or lusts. God is ever ready to give us all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). We need food for life and godliness, for where one starts to starve he may steal (Psalm 125:3).

It is for this reason that it is also written, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33). This means that God does provide these things, but that he says other things shall be added means you shouldn't look for them in your coming to him. It is not about you getting them, but it being added to you. It is what shall be done for you not what you do for yourself. How and when they get added unto you shouldn't be your concern as such. You seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and leave the rest to God. And of course you must work for a living and let God prosper you.

If any man leaves Christ or fails to come to him, it is because he does not seek the kingdom of God, else if he does, no matter how unpleasant his experience with God is, or how offensive perceives him to be, he would not leave him. When everybody else had left Christ, we read, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:66 - 69). These are they who sought after him for the sake of eternal life. Such

cannot leave Christ for any reason. Oh yeah, they left him and forsook when he was arrested, but that was out of fear and not offence at him.

Finally, everything we do must be done in sincerity. The profession of our faith must be in sincerity. Sincerity that means that what we profess guides how we guide our affairs and our dealings with God and man. Even humility which we've spoken about earlier must be in sincerity. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "Now even Job himself is not silent respecting his own sins; and your friend, of course, is justly of opinion that humility must not by any means "be put on the side of falsehood?" Whatever confession, therefore, Job makes, inasmuch as he is a true worshipper of God, he undoubtedly makes it in truth." So humility itself must be in sincerity. Our whole life must be lived in absolute sincerity, and when we seek God we must do so in utmost sincerity.

Purity Of Heart

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."
(Matthew 5:8)

He who must find God must also be a person who is pure in heart. Such a person is who I call a morally upright person. Jesus says so quite clearly in the verse above. Do you want to see God? You must have a pure heart. If you don't have a pure heart, seek to make it pure first before approaching God. Seeking God without a pure heart is a futile if not a tragic bound endeavour. For they who drew close to him and offered strange

fire were slain. Better not to draw close to God at all than to draw close to him with a defiled heart.

The psalmist also said a lot about the criteria of entering into God's presence and they revolve around having a pure heart. He started it with the question, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psalm 24:3). He then goes to give an answer to his question saying, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." (Psalm 24:4). All of these speak of moral uprightness. I know much of the so called Christian teachings of today talk little about pursuing a life of moral uprightness, but let any body that seek to experience the manifest presence of the Lord be persuaded of this one thing that it is essential to strive to live a life of moral uprightness if one must experience God's presence.

I say that a man must strive for moral uprightness to find God because it is not because it is the man that has attained to a state of moral uprightness that shall find God, but because it is he that strives for purity though he, in his sincerity, is conscious of his sins and moral failures, it is he that shall find God. Yea, indeed not only is it that he shall find God because he seeks after God, rather God shall himself go after such like a shepherd seeks for his lost sheep.

Having a pure heart does not necessarily mean that one is morally upright, but simply means one is sincere from within his heart, acknowledging what is true. If he has moral shortcomings he doesn't flatter himself with deceits to claim he's holy. He acknowledges his sins and repents with contrition. So he's pure on account of the sincerity of his heart. Jesus gave many parables to show how and why this is the case, saying on one

occasion, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10). So let not him that has moral shortcomings distance himself from Christ thinking he's too sinful. No, let him come still for Christ is not merely waiting to welcome him but is in fact in search of him. Only let him be sincere and humble.

It is written, "For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one That prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people." (2 Chronicles 30:18 - 20). The people sought the Lord but they had not cleansed themselves. The natural consequence of this was to be slain but king Hezekiah prayed for them and God healed them. We have the obligation to prepare our heart to seek God. Of such God is disposed to help. For those who don't attain to perfect purity, so far they have the heart to be perfect, God shall pardon and still welcome them.

More shall be said about purity of heart in later chapters. We have just discussed the importance of these things to experiencing the manifest presence of God, but in later chapters we shall discuss about them to a much fuller extent, God willing.

Conclusion

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."
(Philippians 1:9 - 10)

In our search for God we must do so with all humility, absolute sincerity, and purity of heart. For as many as presume to come to God without these characteristics would never find God both in life and death. May God help us all. Amen.

Prayer: Our holy God of faithfulness and uprightness, help is to be humble, sincere and pure in our hearts. Remove all hypocrisy and presumptions from us that we come after you with an uprightness that you impart. And by this may we find you and experience your presence richly. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 14: THE STEADFAST GOD-WARD GAZE

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."
(Isaiah 45:22)

In the verse above we see God's invitation to all the earth to look unto him. Having considered many things in this section, from God's call to us to actually finding him, I wish to conclude with this invitation.

The soul can't be satisfied with anything in the brevity of time. That is why the hymn writer wrote "soul of mine, why art thou pleading**?** Why art thou not satisfied**?**" He was conscious of the yearning of his soul and knew that his soul couldn't be satisfied with things within this ephemeral world. Say to the soul, "here is abundance of sumptuous food, feast and enjoy yourself," and the soul will look the other way. Say to the soul, "here is prosperity," and the soul will look the other way. Say to the soul, "here is fame, power, prestige and honour," and the soul will look the other way. Take the soul to the top of a mountain and in a twinkling of an eye, show it all the wonders of the world and kingdoms in all their glories, and say "soul of mine, I will give you all these for I have the power to do so, if only you will be satisfied." And still the soul will look the other way. But here the soul expresses what will satisfy it; "I shall be

satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15). When the soul awakes, and in the light of Christ could behold the glory of God, then would the soul be satisfied with the likeness of the Eternal One. In this world, nothing will do. The gaze of the soul that must be satisfied must be fixed on the living God. The living God also says "I am God, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:22). By this we know there is none else that can take the place of God in our lives. None else can satisfy the soul. None else can save. "Look unto me," says the Lord. Let every soul that seeks satisfaction accept this invitation.

When we have our gaze fixed on Jesus, we stop being prone to being blown by the wind of our feelings. The world changes often and so do we change often and our feelings with us. If we are swept by the wind of our feelings, we'd be most depressed and lack direction in life. Following your feelings can not guide you aright. With ease our feelings rest on anything pleasant we find around us, and we all are guilty of having self serving motives. For this reason the storm that buffet our feelings is strong and violent. We can only be stable, unshaken, and happy when we can look through all the changes in life, all the inconsistencies of our feelings, to gaze at him alone who says "I am the LORD, I change not..." (Malachi 3:6)

The Bible says "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18). To grow into the likeness, and to experience more of the presence of Christ, we must fix our gaze on him. These changes from glory to glory by his Spirit is solely dependent on our steadfast gaze upon his glory.

We are told in Colossians 3:2-3 to "Set your affection on things

above, not on things on the earth." If we must experience God richly we must set our gaze and affection on things above. This we call spirituality. And we are called not to set them on things on the earth, for to set the affection on things of this earth is carnality.

Nothing distracts us from gazing upon God and following him than the carnal things of this world. We must therefore learn to remove our gaze from these things and have a steady gaze on the things above. Not just occasional glances but a steadfast gaze. For a little glance away from the things above would flood our mind with reasons to look away more often and to fix our gaze instead on the things of this world. And when we shift our gaze from our goal to other transitory things, we can be sure that we are on our way to failing from attaining eternal rest with God. We may be distracted from the things above from time to time, meaning we may glance at the things of this world occasionally, but we must always return our steadfast gaze back to the things above. For this reason, Samuel Rutherford wrote, “He that would reckon and tell all the stones in his way, in a journey of three or four hundred miles, and write up in his count-book all the herbs and the flowers growing in his way, might come short of his journey.” So why we may not be able to stop our eyes from seeing the stones and herbs on our way, we mustn't stop our journey to count them.

How then do we gaze on God? As we have said, we gaze upon him in his word, the Bible, we gaze upon him in meditating upon his word and prayer, and we gaze upon him in beholding his glory in his creation.

The Imaginary Jesus

"Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."
(John 20:29)

It is funny though, how people, rather than fixing the gaze of the spirit on Jesus, they'd rather fix their gaze upon a picture of a bearded man with a staff, and that they call Jesus. I have seen the way people behold those characters with so much admiration that I wonder what makes these people think that that is Jesus. You'd see it framed and hanged on walls, you'd see it used as phone wallpapers, you'd see it on so many Christian Facebook page and groups, you'd see it in Bibles for children, and when you've seen it in all these places, you can't avoid seeing it in your head. So many pictures out there and they all claim to portray Jesus, but somebody once made this comment; "the way these artists paint Jesus, you'd think if he hadn't died on the cross, he'd had died of tobaccolosis." How true. He looks so frail and pale like someone devoid of good health. But all these paintings keep rolling out even though none of the producers have ever seen Jesus and no portrait of him was made with which they could be guided. If you were to go to a Christian Facebook page and post the Lord's Prayer there, you'd probably get three likes and one "Amen," but let someone post a picture of a bearded man with clothes wrapped around his body, and write "if you see Jesus type AMEN," you'd probably get up to five hundred likes and three hundred thunderous AMEN. By their understanding, that is Jesus. Such an imaginary Christ can't satisfy the soul.

A.W. Tozer made this statement "if you are okay with an imaginary Christ, you should be okay also with an imaginary salvation." Jesus in the heart is fairer, brighter, dearer, nearer, and lovelier than any "Jesus" on any artwork. Borrowing from the words of the hymnodist, fair is the sunshine, fair is the moonlight, fair are the stars above, fair are the woodlands, meadows, architectural masterpieces, but Jesus in the heart is fairer than them all. Why then would one be satisfied with a beggarly picture of man suffering from tobaccolosis.

How people adore imaginations is quite baffling. Most great men of the past portrayed in arts and statues are not themselves. I was once watching the documentary of Horatio Nelson and read how he was attracted to a model. It was said of this model that she used to pose for sculptors to make statues and paintings of people of old. And from my little knowledge of these things, no effort is made to make these arts accurate. It is therefore obvious that these arts and portrayals are deceptions. They don't have remains of these people so they falsify their statues, misrepresenting them, and they've done this to the saints of the past and even to our dear Lord. Let no man think that beholding this foul art that he's beholding the Master.

The following is the experience of Martin Luther, the reformer, an account he gave himself.

"I being on Good Friday last in my inner chamber, in fervent prayer, contemplating with myself how Christ my Saviour hung on the Cross, how he suffered and died for our sins, there suddenly appeared upon the wall a bright shining vision, and a glorious form of our Saviour Christ, with the five wounds, steadfastly looking upon me, as if it had been Christ himself corporeally. Now, at the first sight, I thought it had been some

good Revelation: yet I recollected that surely it must needs be the juggling of the devil, for Christ appeareth unto us in his word, and in a meaner and more humble form; therefore I spake to the vision in this manner: 'Avoid, thou confounded devil; I know no other Christ than he who was crucified, and who in his Word is pictured unto me.' Whereupon the image vanished."

Here we see Martin Luther would not so much as think that even a revelation or a mysterious appearance of an image is Christ, but rebuked it. That is a truly spiritual man. Sadly much of the people we call Christians today are not even Christians at all but are mere fanatics and carnal minded fellows who seek nothing about God and heed no warning of him. Much of the modern day Christians would think that a picture can depict Christ. It doesn't even bother them if that image they are looking at could as well be a portrait of an occultic grand master, who has committed abominable evils at one point in time in history or the other, or a "confounded devil." No, any bearded fellow is enough to gaze at and admire as the Saviour. And see what the spiritual man said? He said, "yet I recollected that surely... Christ appeareth unto us in his word." The spiritual man knows this and won't take silly apparitions as a divine revelation.

Therefore when the Bible says "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:18), it is in no way talking about looking at a picture. I hope this practice of calling paintings of a bearded man with a staff, a sheep on his shoulders, or stretching out a hand to a sinking man, is Christ. Jesus in the word only is the true Christ that we are to gaze upon. If he be introduced into our heart by the word, how much surely would we experience his manifest presence. How much surely shall our

souls be satisfied. But if we go awhoring after paintings and demonic apparitions presented to us by confounded artists and devils, we can be sure that we shall feed our souls not with that which satisfies but with the poison which kills. "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29).

Gazing In The Word

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."
(John 5:39)

More on finding Christ in his word. To have our eyes fixed on God we must as often as possible read the word of God or hear the word of God. We don't glance at his word but gaze upon it. By this I mean study it. Studying the word of God enlightens us. This is the mirror that reflects eternity to us. Through this word we can look into the eternal things though in a temporal world. There is no other thing in our possession with which we can gaze at the eternal things and the eternal One. No, no paintings or apparitions.

The modern day Christian has what it takes to gaze on God everywhere than Christians of any other age. You can take the Bible with you in your simple phone anywhere you go. Faith cometh by hearing. By this we know that hearing the word of God is also important just as reading it is. For this reason, our audio Bible could help us to a great extent in having our gaze

fixed on God. We could hear the word while at the bus stop, while doing house chores, or even while sick and unable to read. This way our soul could be constantly in every place satisfied in beholding God. Our audio Bible, I believe, is an exceptional gift, let's make the best use of it.

Now I don't mean to say that this could replace our actually reading the Bible. The reading of the Bible can't be replaced with the listening of it. There are quite some reasons to this, of which the most important and obvious is that in listening you can be very easily distracted and the reader may not read at your pace of digestion, for what is the benefit of hearing without digesting what is being read? "“Reading without reflection," said Dr. Lyman Abbott, "like eating without digestion, produces dyspepsia.” So audio books can just play on without giving you time to reflect. Sometimes, you could be so distracted and your mind strays away that after listening to an audio Bible for a long length of time, only to realise that you didn't even get a word of what has been read. This happens to me severally and so I speak from experience. It is always best to read your Bible yourself but when you're away from the place of your quiet time, the audio Bible could come in handy.

We ought to gaze steadily upon God in his word and not merely glance at him. By this I mean we ought to spend quality time in reading the word. I know many like being brief in scripture readings and sermons. My favourite daily devotional was Every Day With Jesus which was a powerful devotional and very spiritual. But the great old man who wrote it passed on in 2006, about a year and a half after my conversion. It was with joy when I heard that his ministry would still keep publishing his writings by revising and publishing his past editions. One thing about that devotional is that it gives you a considerable amount

of scripture portion to read each day whereas there are many others that give the reader just one verse or even half a verse. Devotionals are an important part of each day of a Christian's life, and it is important to read a considerable amount of verses with each day's study. A single verse would do very little good. When a devotional presents you with scanty words from the Bible and voluminous words from the author, they're more focused on teaching you their own word than God's word. I believe a healthy devotional should always have a good balance of God's word and the word of the author. Then the reader should also spend time in his own personal and further study of the word of God.

Let me use this opportunity to warn Christians that not all that is called devotional is fit for Christian consumption. They may have Bible verses and use Bible texts in their explanations but we must be wary of liars. Apart from Everyday With Jesus, I don't know of any devotional that is fit for Christian devotion. Some devotionals just fill your head with the fumes of heresies. I once went to the house of a client and met them doing a Bible study and the devotional they were using had for a title something like, "how to dominate." What a foolish thing to be seeking to teach Christians. But the proud and vain would approve of such because though they claim to be walking with the meek and lowly Christ they're still vain and desirous of vainglory. Some are just a collection of touching stories that the author seeks to tell you about the wonderful things God can do. But we know God can do all things. We don't need such stories to convince us. We needn't use the precious hours of our days listening to touching stories. Rather men ought to be reminded of their duty and how to do them. Men ought to be taught to trust God, not by stories but by admonition for the sole purpose of enabling them to do their duty more gladly and more truly.

And so on and so forth. Each hour of our days is too important to be spent listening to wowing stories. What if they're false? It is not beyond the ability of so-called writers and devotional writers of today to tell false stories.

Lord Francis Bacon wrote:

"This facility of credit and accepting or admitting things weakly authorised or warranted is of two kinds according to the subject: for it is either a belief of history, or, as the lawyers speak, matter of fact; or else of matter of art and opinion. As to the former, we see the experience and inconvenience of this error in ecclesiastical history; which hath too easily received and registered reports and narrations of miracles wrought by martyrs, hermits, or monks of the desert, and other holy men, and their relics, shrines, chapels and images: which though they had a passage for a time by the ignorance of the people, the superstitious simplicity of some and the politic toleration of others holding them but as divine poesies, yet after a period of time, when the mist began to clear up, they grew to be esteemed but as old wives' fables, impostures of the clergy, illusions of spirits, and badges of Antichrist, to the great scandal and detriment of religion."

We see how that it is common to tell touching stories which are entirely false even for so-called religious purposes. So let's not follow all these old wives' fables. By the way, any story that is not factual is an old wives tale. Let our life be spent in actual study of scriptures and the most important thing, as we had said before, is for us to know the duty we owe God and how to render it to him.

We've talked about reading the Bible before so I'll stop here. But

we ought to gaze upon God and not just glance at him. Of course that doesn't mean we should spend the whole day in reading the Bible. I only mean we should spend quality time reading our Bible each day. How we keep our eyes steadfastly on him even away from his word shall bring us to the next point.

Meditation

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."
(Joshua 1:8)

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."
(Psalm 19:14)

Now, we know that we cannot be before our Bibles the whole day. Does that mean we only gaze upon him for the period of time we can spend before our Bibles? No! We can take God with us everywhere. Like a man who's deeply in love with his spouse would go everywhere with a photo of her. The wallpaper of his phones, tablets and PCs would be of her face. On his desk in the office is a standing frame with her. Even the wallpaper of his dream when he closes his eyes in sleep would be the face of his loving spouse. Maybe that's going too far but you get what I

mean. So also must we, take God about with us in our hearts and thoughts.

It is good to read the Bible, but we shouldn't stop at reading. We ought to meditate upon it morning, evening and night. Never think it is a waste of time or mental energy if you do this all the time. By meditating upon the word of God, we keep God in view, and how our soul would be glad by this alone. And how everything else in life would be kept in proper perspective.

Though we can meditate on things requiring it, such as on how to solve a pressing problem, but nothing ought to fill the mind of the child of God more than God himself. We ought to meditate on his majesty, power, greatness, our duties to him, his promises, the bliss of spending eternity with him and every other thing that has to do with God, and what we've read in his word. This is sweet to the soul. The psalmist knew of the sweetness of meditating on God when he said "My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD." (Psalm 104:34). Let our meditations be pleasing in God's sight, and our souls would be blessed.

Apart from the sweetness of thinking about God, his goodness, his majesty, etc., meditation has so many other benefits but the aim as a Christian is to draw closer to God and to allow his words sink into our hearts and in fact, the entirety of our being. Some natural physiological changes resulting from meditation are:

- less oxygen consumption
- less carbon dioxide exhaled
- less muscle tension
- relieving of pain
- lowered heart rate

- lowered blood pressure
- lowered respiration rate

These physiological changes help the person achieve a sense of calm and well being. Even in pain, meditation helps the person to focus on something else other than the pain and it helps to reduce the stress in the body. It serves as a beneficial non-medicinal pain reliever.

Those are the opinions of psychologists which make us to understand that meditation has a very key role to play in our well-being. But we know that you can meditate on rubbish too. By meditation a lot of rubbish has been propounded. Truly we can meditate on anything (I suppose this is provided it is not on family problems) and it will help improve our well being. We as Christians are commanded to think on things above and that is where our meditation should be focused on.

But the most important benefit of the earthly benefits of meditation is that of improved memory retention. According to psychologists, when you read you remember only about 44% of what we read within just an hour and that reduces rapidly with time. But when you rehearse you remember far more of what you read and it sticks for a longer time. With practice and use it sticks even more. And that is as good as it can get, according to psychologists. However, when we make it a habit to meditate upon the word of God we can remember close to 100% of what we read. And when the Holy Ghost teaches us, we remember well over 100% of what we read. But we can still forget all these with time so there is a need for consistency in meditation.

If mere meditating on anything can improve our well being, how much more would it greatly improve our well being if we

meditate on that which satisfies well the soul. So meditation plays a key role to our memory and memory in turn is very key to our heavenward journey. It is written, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:2). Note the IF in the verse. To paraphrase it, it means we are saved IF we keep in memory. If our salvation is important, as we know it is more important to us than all the world and the things in it, then keeping the message of our salvation (and God himself) in memory is very important too. And so also is our practice of meditation very important.

That is why God commanded Joshua thus, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." (Joshua 1:8). And Paul also advised Timothy saying, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all." (1 Timothy 4:15).

So, meditating is very important for our heavenward journey with God. Let us take God with us everywhere we go in our minds. And so shall our walk with God be sweet.

The Glory Of God In His Creation

"But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD."
(Numbers 14:21)

Having seen that we are always to fix the gaze of our souls upon God, our exceedingly great reward, it is good to remind ourselves that God is omnipresent. There is no place which is unholy for every place is holy and suitable for us to turn our eyes to God and behold his majesty. We are to carry him consciously in our hearts always, thinking and meditating on his majesty, and seeing his glory in everything around us.

When God sent Nathan the prophet to David to speak to him, he said, "And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth." (2 Samuel 7:9). Everywhere David went God went with him. It is in the same way he goes with us everywhere we go. And if it is so that he goes with us everywhere we go, we can behold him everywhere we go. And again it is written in Exodus 8:22, "And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth." God is not far from us. He is here in the midst of the earth. It takes the truly spiritual to see him in all things.

We must learn to see the glory of God in everything. We are mere men full of weaknesses, and for this reason we are ever in need of props in everything we do. If we have a program we need something outside our being to assist us in remembering. Probably an alarm, a checklist, etc. These things are called aide-mémoire. In meditating about God we also need prop to aid us in our meditation. Something to bring our minds back to God. Thanks be to God for the whole earth is full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3). All the things we see on earth all speak of his glory and so abound in aide-mémoires which we can make use of in our

spiritual exercise.

In the twenty sixth chapter of the book of Job, he said a lot of things about how the whole of creation speaks of God's power. He said many things about God's incomprehensible majesty, but he asked a solemn question which brings to bear a very sad truth when he said in Job 26:14 "but how little a portion is heard of him?" Though the whole of creation speaks of God's power and magnificence, yet very little is heard of him, not because the creation isn't loud enough but because men aren't listening. Elsewhere in the same book of Job, the Bible says (Job 33:14) "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." O that men, especially we of the Christian fold would learn to hear the voice of creation testify of the greatness of God's majesty. O that we would be able to see God in his creation.

There's something to note however which A.W. Tozer noted in his book, "The Pursuit Of God," it is not that when we touch a stone, or a wood, or anything at all, be it natural or man-made, we assume that we have touched God. No, but we perceive and observe his greatness in the things he hath created.

A.W. Tozer, in one of his sermons, also told a story of a Christian viewing the sea as it reflected the sun. There was a merchant standing by to whom this Christian man asked "what do you see?" The merchant responded something like "I see gold all over the horizon upon the sea." "What do you see?" Asked the merchant. The Christian responded, "I see angels bowing before the throne of God saying, Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory." For so it was. This Christian man with the understanding that the whole earth is full of God's glory was able to see his glory in the same scene where a merchant saw mere gold all over the horizon.

God is good and loving but this does not mean it is only in the good and pleasant things of life we can see his power and glory. We can also see God in the unpleasant things of life. Therefore we must learn to see him in the unpleasant things in our life also. It is hard to say it but we can. Just as with great problems come great solutions, and hard times thoroughly refine the man who goes through them, we can look through unpleasant things to see the wonderful workings of God. The glory of God can be seen even in a thing as cruel as death. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

If we see the glory of God in everything as they present them to us, we will learn to venerate and appreciate all things for this is the only way we would be able to act rightly towards others. How differently would we see life if we would open our eyes to be able to see the glory of God in everything around us. How differently you would relate with your siblings and parents if only you could see the glory of God in them. How differently would life in its entirety be, if we open our eyes to the glory of God it reflects. Not that we set inordinate affection on any created thing but because we see the handiwork of God in them, we love them for his sake. Thomas à Kempis wrote of the Lord revealing to him saying "for My sake is every one to be loved." Yes, we are to love for his sake alone. If this were so, all faults would be hidden, all love would be purer, and all affections holier. And so shall life be brighter in its entirety.

In agreement to this, John Keble (1792-1866) wrote,

"Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
As more of heaven in each we see;
Some softening gleam of love and prayer

Shall dawn on every cross and care."

So many Christian people down the ages have enjoyed the wonder of beholding God in all things. Some have penned down words that show us what a beautiful sight it is to see God in all things. An old church song which is still sung goes:

"You are welcome in the name of the Lord,
You are welcome in the name of the Lord,
We can see in you,
The glory of the Lord,
You are welcome in the name of the Lord."

Most of the time the new people in churches are new Christians or just strangers in our midsts, but in the thoughts of the person who authored the song the glory of God is still clearly seen in them. Let's see more of what saints of old had to say regarding the glory of God being visible in his creation.

Isaac Watts wrote,

"Lord, how thy wonders are display'd
Where'er I turn mine eye,
If I survey the ground I tread,
Or gaze upon the sky.

There's not a plant or flower below
But makes thy glories known;
And clouds arise and tempests blow
By order from thy throne.

Creatures (as num'rous as they be)
Are subject to thy care:

There's not a place where we can flee,
But God is present there.”

In Cotterill’s Selections, Jane B. Cotterill wrote,

“Thrice blest will all our blessings be,
When we can look through them to Thee;
When each glad heart its tribute pays
Of love and gratitude and praise.”

Carrie E. Breck (1855–1934) wrote,

“Not a bird that doth not sing
Sweetest praises to Thy name;
Not an insect on the wing
But Thy wonders doth proclaim.”

All these and far more express how we can behold God in all things. Shall we not join the enraptured saints of old in beholding the glory of God in his creation?

It is written, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14). It is my prayer that the whole inhabitants of the earth shall be filled with this glorious knowledge of the glory of God and may it start with his church. O may we in truth begin to see in one another and in everything else, the glory of the Lord. Amen.

How Sin Blurs Out Our Heavenward Vision

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."
(Matthew 5:8)

It is important to know the adverse effect of sin to our heavenward vision. Sin blurs out our heavenward vision and kills the joy that comes with this vision. As the verse above says, it is the pure in heart that shall see God. The moment we allow sin into our lives, even if we've been having the wonderful visions of God and of his manifest presence before, this vision begins to become blurry. And if we do nothing about it by means of repentance, we shall find with time that we can no longer see God, nor experience his joy.

When our hearts are pure we shall see God in almost all we set our eyes upon. So in talking about a steadfast God-ward gaze, we must know that sin ought to be consciously striven against. Isaiah 51:1 says, "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." Though God calls all the earth to look unto him as we have seen in Isaiah 45:22, yet we see here an especial call to the righteous. First the call to all the earth is a call to righteousness, and also we have a special call to the righteous to look unto the rock from which we were hewn and the pit from which we were dug. That rock and pit is Christ.

There are other things that can becloud our God-ward gaze. Worry for example, though not a sin, does becloud our God-ward gaze. That is why Christ warns us against it (Matthew 6:25-34). The love and lust of the things of the world also could

blur our God-ward vision. There are other things that could blur our God-ward vision, but the greatest of these is sin. We can't have these and be able to gaze steadily upon God. So let's get rid of them all. Not just sin alone.

The Futility And Sinfulness Of Iconodulism

"... for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"
(Romans 8:24)

Iconodulism is one practice that we don't have here in my part of the world except in the Roman Catholic church which I don't consider Christian anyways. But since I know that this practice could be rife in some parts of the world it is good to write against it here.

So what is Iconodulism? It is derived from its root word "iconoduly" which is defined as the veneration of images. This is one and the same as idolatry, one of the foremost and most condemned sins of the Bible. It is written, "Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God." (Leviticus 26:1).

I have read many defences in support of the practice, but it is totally sinful and should not be done on any account. In his book "The Advancement of Learning," Lord Francis Bacon before criticising it pointed out the major defence of this bad practice saying, "... as images are said by the Roman Church to fix the

cogitations and raise the devotions of them that pray before them." They assume that these images can serve as a prop in our devotions. Though I said that we're ever in need of props, when we look at this defence we may assume that icons also constitute one of such props, but icons are never a prop. For props are supposed to be an aid to help us for that for which it was employed, but iconodulism, being a sin, works against the thing for which it is employed. We've seen earlier that sin does becloud our heavenward gaze. While those who defend say it helps us to fix our cogitations and raise our devotions, the truth is, being a sin, it both works against our devotion and beclouds our heavenward gaze. It does exactly the reverse of what it is claimed to do.

Even the works of God in which I said we can see the glory of God can only display his power and not himself. Though we can experience his presence richly, we must wait till eternity to see him as he is. Apostle Paul asked a pertinent question, "... for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Romans 8:24). We have a hope of eternity, and it is not our lot to see God as he is in the here and now. If then we have the images of him here and now, why then do we hope for a time when we shall see him as he is? What sort of godless and adulterous impatience would be pushing us to seek after images to look at? We have the whole of eternity to gaze upon God, why shall we lose eternity because of poorly crafted works of art?

The same applies to the images of those called saints. One of the hopes of eternity is to also be united with the saints. To be united with Abraham, David, Peter, Paul, etc. So if we have the images of these people now, why then do we hope for a time when we shall see them? And so hope that is seen is not hope. And if we are saved by hope as stated in the verse, then there is

no hope. But if indeed we have hope then do we wait for the blessed day when we shall see God, his Christ, and his holy saints. So we don't have any reason to be setting images before us to look upon.

Lord Francis Bacon, which we've quoted before explaining the main defence of those who practice iconodulism, later went on to destroy the practice in a way that took a different turn. He wrote, "But for mine own judgment, if it be admitted that imagination hath power, and that ceremonies fortify imagination, and that they be used sincerely and intentionally for that purpose; yet I should hold them unlawful, as opposing to that first edict which God gave unto man, In sudore vultus comedes panem tuum [meaning, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread..." (Genesis 3:19)]. For they propound those noble effects, which God hath set forth unto man to be bought at the price of labour, to be attained by a few easy and slothful observances. Deficiences in these knowledges I will report none, other than the general deficience, that it is not known how much of them is verity, and how much vanity.” Very brilliantly said. That which ought to be sought earnestly and diligently is made to look like child's play. Just by looking at images and you can, by means of mere imaginations, behold God and his saints. But here's a reminder for the Bible says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). If he rewards only those who diligently seek him, not those who seek him with levity and in vanity, then why should we think that by the casual observances of looking at some petty images we would be aided in devotion or prayer, or by any means draw us close to God. It doesn't work. We don't draw close to God or behold him by slackness.

Conclusion

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..."
(Hebrews 12:2)

We have a call to look unto God and to no other, living or non living. How shall we behold the unseen God? We must behold him in his word, meditations, and by prayer. All of creation speaks to us of his greatness.

A.B. Simpson wrote, "It is a great principle that where we recognize God, there God will meet us. Recognize Him in the heavens, He will meet us in the heavens; recognize Him by our side and He will speak to us from beside us; recognize Him in our inmost heart and He will meet us there. Let us meet Him as an abiding presence. Let us trust Him as a faithful Keeper. Let us set the Lord always before us, and say with the Psalmist: "Because he is at my right hand, therefore I will not be moved."

To the true child of God, having God's presence is a thing of delight. Agreeing with us, à Kempis Thomas said "The godly man everywhere beareth about with him his own Comforter, Jesus, and saith unto Him: 'Be with me, Lord Jesus, always and everywhere.'" Feeling his presence close to us has that effect of consoling us to an extent greater than what any other source of comfort can afford. The comfort of men will fail you, but the comfort that comes from Jesus in the heart surpasses all comforts.

Let us end this section with a hymn by LeRoy Moore, 1897, which is also a prayer:

"At the noontide, while we labor
In this world of care,
Let us feel Thy holy presence,
With us everywhere;
Teaching us the precious lessons,
As we journey on;
Filling us with peace and gladness,
Till the day is done."

Amen. On this note we come to the end of this section. Let us move on to the next.

Prayer: Dear Father whose glory fills the earth, we beseech that as the earth is ever full of your glory, may the knowledge of that same glory fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. And dear Lord may it start with me. Teach me to gaze upon you in your word, in prayer, to meditate upon you and your word everywhere I go, and behold you in your creation. Keep me away for the error of iconodulism. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

SECTIONAL HYMN

The Master Calleth

By Charles Geesey

We hear Thy tender, loving voice,
Which saith Come unto Me,
That I may all your burdens bear,
And let your souls be free.

Chorus:
Coming, blessèd Jesus,
Coming now to Thee;
Coming, yes, we're coming,
Thro' Thy grace so free.

We know we've wandered far away,
Upon forbidden ground,
But we rejoice, O blessèd thought,
Thou may'st be always found.
Chorus

Oh, wondrous love! Oh, grace divine!
That saves us from the fall;
While mercy stands, with outstretched hands,
We will accept the call.
Chorus

SECTION 3

WALKING WITH GOD

CHAPTER 15: WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

"The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."
(Micah 6:9)

Now we come to a new section in which we shall now talk about maintaining God's presence. We had said in the introductory section that we are sojourners with God and to maintain his presence we have to move with him. Therefore this section is titled walking with God. By walking with him, I mean maintaining his presence. Being steadfast in his presence.

So the first and foremost thing to point out in this section is understanding. For the purpose of our study, and to make easy progress, we shall sometimes be using the words understanding, knowledge, and wisdom interchangeably though in reality they vary one from another.

It is written, "The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." (Micah 6:9). It is the man of wisdom that shall see the name of God, not the fool and the slacker. We are also invited here to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it. This informs us of the importance of hearing to understanding.

When it says hear the rod, it doesn't mean we should hear a sound, but that we pay attention to the rod. For when a sound is made we don't need to be invited to hear it. Everyone with ears would hear it loud and clear. This is a call to pay attention to God and to understand him and not just himself but his works too. When it says, "hear ye the rod," it means we should pay attention to his works and understand it, and when it says "and who hath appointed it," it means we should pay attention to himself and understand him. For the fact that it addresses God with the words, "and who hath appointed it," it means it requires understanding on our part to be able, by observing the work accomplished by the rod, to trace the doer of the work. So this is a sublime call to us, as Christians, to be a people of understanding.

Some think that progress in the Christian faith is made by strenuous effort, but progress in the faith is made by making progress in understanding. Progress in understanding is the steps by which we make advancements in the faith. If advancement in the understanding of God and his works shall be the ladder by which we go up, not some of the vain outward show people recommend as being beneficial to spiritual progress, we shall find our Christian journey gladder.

The Bible stresses the importance of not just hearing but to pay close attention to and understand the word of God. Ezekiel 40:4 says, "And the man said unto me, Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee; for to the intent that I might shew them unto thee art thou brought hither: declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel." To understand requires listening with the ear and seeing with the eye. Sadly, not many Christians think that so much care and effort is required for this our most

holy faith. They talk about going to church, listen to sermons without scriptural and logical basis, dance, give money, and attend endless prayer sessions, but yet actively downplay the importance of thorough studies as though it were inimical to the faith. Even when preachers talk of getting knowledge they only talk of coming to church as the source of knowledge. But that is a terrible assumption I suppose must have originated from the pit of hell. So much of our lives' effort ought to be in the strife to know and understand God's will. And to know God's will cannot come without a careful and earnest endeavour.

God is not so well pleased with what C.S. Lewis describes as intellectual slackers. He said, "God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than of any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all." He's so right. I marvel how the idea that we needn't be sound intellectuals as Christians became so widespread. Such an idea is so alien to the faith. A brief glance at church histories would reveal how Christians were people of sound knowledge and understanding. The writings of the bishops of the remote past were so thoroughly sound in logic, philosophy, science, reason, and spirituality. How shall any who thinks he's worthy of bearing the name they bore think it were okay to be an intellectual slacker? No! This is all a deception from the pit of hell.

We can't really tell where this false idea that God is not interested in our intellect originated from. The whole of scripture is full of verses that emphasises the utmost importance of understanding which requires having a sound intellect. Here are some verses:

- Philippians 1:9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;" Knowledge has always been an important aspect of the faith. To the bishops, deacons, and each and every believer. It was the prayer of our beloved apostle Paul that Christians abound in knowledge and all judgment with an ever increasing degree.

- Colossians 1:9-10, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Here we have what is called spiritual understanding. Not carnal understanding. Here again apostle Paul prays that Christians be filled with wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual understanding with an ever increasing degree.

- Proverbs 19:20, "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." Getting counsel and receiving instruction are some of the primary reasons for study. And we are admonished here to hear counsel and receive instruction. To do this we must be given to much study. Not on mere reading of texts for just any reason but reading for the purpose of getting counsel and receiving instruction.

- Proverbs 19:2, "Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth." It is a bad thing for the soul to be without knowledge.

- Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." God seemed to be lamenting here, and what he lamented about was that his people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. God was willing to reject his very people for the fact that they lacked knowledge and to forget their children. That is to tell us how distasteful the lack of knowledge is to God.

- 2 Peter 1:2, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." It is by means of the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus that grace and peace is multiplied. Grace is about the most central theme of the New Testament, and it is also about the most emphasised of all Christian doctrine today. However, as emphasised as grace is, very little emphasis is laid on knowledge. But grace is multiplied through the knowledge of God of his Christ. So, the knowledge of God ought to be emphasised more than grace. For grace shall be the natural result of knowledge.

- 2 Peter 1:5-6, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness." If we consider these as building blocks, knowledge is to be built on virtue. This tells us of the high importance of virtue to our faith. This suggests to us that it is possible to possess faith and virtue without knowledge since faith and virtue precedes knowledge. But everything else must be built on

knowledge. The man with faith and virtue who does not possess knowledge is not a whole Christian.

- Hosea 6:6, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Above all the sacrifices and other acts of service that can be considered a sacrifice, the knowledge of God is desired by God more than they.

- Matthew 15:16, "And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?" Jesus expects his followers to be a people of understanding. Any one bearing the name of Christ who wallows in ignorance should be rest assured that the master is displeased with him or her. To him the master is asking with a tone of disappointment, "Are ye also yet without understanding?"

- Jeremiah 9:23-24, "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." The knowledge of God is the only justifiable basis for boasting for in this boasting there is still inherent humility. For it takes ignorance to be proud, but humility is founded on knowledge. And the knowledge of the Holy in particular humbles.

If this be the case that God places such a high importance on knowledge and the acquisition of it, how then shall it be deemed a thing that is not so necessary or that one should pursue after

it with slackness. What I've seen with my eyes is preachers convincing or trying to convince their congregation that studying thoroughly is not good for them. They should just believe that Jesus died for them and that Jesus loves them and that would suffice to make a good Christian. Anything more than this could make them question God. They defend their argument with the verse that says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." (Colossians 2:8). So here they have a very powerful verse to misinterpret. For the word "spoil" is good to frighten people about being spoilt from the process of study. But the philosophy spoken against here is that which is after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. So there is a thorough study after Christ (which may be termed philosophy), and there is a study not after him. It is these philosophies that are not after Christ that spoil. Seeing that there are those who are against Christians going in search of knowledge, we therefore need a special reminder that the thirst for knowledge and our faith are inseparable.

I wouldn't go further here to speak about why the rest of the Bible contradicts the misinterpretation given to this verse. I hope to write another book dedicated to just Christian reasoning and studies. But this should suffice to convince us that the Bible does not frown at knowledge. Rather, it encourages that every Christian should earnestly pursue after knowledge, given to much study of the Bible, doctrinal research, and study of histories pertaining to the church. And above all these to pray earnestly for divine illumination.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine of Hippo wrote, “It is one thing to be ignorant, and another thing to be unwilling to know.” He went

on to say, “it is not reckoned to you as a fault that you are involuntarily ignorant, but that you neglect to search out what you are ignorant of; nor is it imputed to you in censure that you do not bind up the limbs that are wounded, but that you despise him who wishes to heal them.” Ignorance is a fault. To be willingly ignorant is a great fault. God wouldn't be displeased with those who are ignorant but are willing to know, but seeing the host of things written in the Bible that charges us to go after knowledge and understanding, to be unwilling to know is a flagrant disobedience to Biblical injunctions.

Jesus, when he gave the parable of the sower, talked about the different ways men receive the gospel of Christ. He made mention of four types of grounds on which the seeds of the sower fell. The wayside, the stony ground, the thorny ground and the good ground. Only the good ground was productive. When explaining what he meant by the good ground, Christ said, "But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and UNDERSTANDETH it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matthew 13:23). The major quality of the people he likened to the good ground is that they hear the word and understand it. And since this is talking about the kingdom of God, it means understanding is key to entering the kingdom of heaven.

For this reason the Devil uses ignorance to drive men to hell who otherwise should have been saved. Richard Baxter wrote, “How could he [the Devil] get so many millions to hell willingly, if they knew they were going thither! And how could they avoid knowing it, if they did but thoroughly try; having such a clear light and sure rule in the Scripture to discover it? If the snare be not hid, the bird will escape it.” Driving men to

ignorance or to think ignorance had a virtue of some kind is the Devil's trap to catch men and cast them down to Hell. We need to strive to have a proper knowledge of scriptures for the sakes of our souls.

It is worthy to note right early that while we must go after knowledge we must be careful not to land ourselves in damnable heresies. To believe and hold a heresy is not understanding, rather it is disunderstanding. It is not mere knowledge that Jesus says makes a good soil, it is understanding. And this brings us to our next point.

The Knowledge Of The Holy

"... the knowledge of the holy is understanding."
(Proverbs 9:10)

We have seen the cardinal importance of understanding to our heavenward journey. What then is understanding? In the text above we see that "the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Many times you'd see people misunderstand the meaning of understanding. They think to be good in one tech field, medical field, literary field, etc. is what makes you to be a person of understanding. But all that is nothing close to understanding.

In Proverbs 30, Agur the son of Jakeh wrote derogatorily about himself to a point of insult. He said, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy." (Proverbs 30:2 - 3). It is derogatory to say a man is brutish. To

say one's own self is more brutish than any man seems both derogatory and an unwise statement. For to say he is more brutish than any man requires him to have known all men, dead and living, and to have carefully assessed their level of intelligence and doing this confirmed that he is the most brutish. We can be sure that he hasn't done such a test for it is both beyond him to do it and the findings he'd make were of such insignificant importance that no sane person would do it. So to say he's more brutish than any man seems both unwise and derogatory to his own self. One would wonder why would one speak so derogatorily about himself. What does he seek to achieve by this? Is this a form of humility? I guess not for humility does not go with unwise statements. A student can't, in the spirit of humility, say he's the worst in class when he does not know the score of other students.

To justify his seemingly derogatory statement about himself, he says, "I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy." (Proverbs 30:3). This is up to him. We can't judge contrary to his declaration about himself. If he says he did not learn wisdom nor have the knowledge of the holy, we have no choice but to believe him.

Now, despite speaking so derogatorily about himself, he then went on to show how deep and thorough his understanding was. First he asks some salient questions. You see, answers are not the best marks of a man with thorough understanding, rather his questions are. He asks, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (Proverbs 30:4). These are deep and mysterious questions that it takes a man of deep thinking to ask

such. By means of divine revelation we have come to know the answers to these questions. We know that he that has done these things is God, and his Son is Jesus Christ. I don't know with certainty if this Agur were a Jew, but he definitely possessed the revelational knowledge by which he could gain an answer to some of these questions of his. If he were a Jew, he probably could know, by the mightiness of the works of God revealed in the Hebrew scriptures, that only God can do such. But with all the revelations in the Hebrew scriptures he couldn't have a hint of what the name of the son of such a mighty God was. So it was a deeply mysterious question he asks. And it takes a man of deep understanding to ask such deep questions.

He went on to instruct about the ways of God showing he has a sound knowledge of God and his ways. What pleases God and what displeases him. His word and how men ought not to add or remove from it. He speaks on contentment and the benefit of being in a modest state in life. Not being too rich or too poor. He talks about different types of generations which means he has a profound knowledge of historical accounts and has applied his heart to the knowledge that can be gotten by this means. He talks of the course of human life, he speaks of wild life, and the wonderful things that go on under the sun. All these are too profound for a man who claims to be more brutish than any man. His knowledge and understanding surpasses that of even intellectuals of our days.

One may think that the wonderful inventions of today and the easy access to knowledge makes us superior to such men like Agur, but when you consider the fact that our forms of knowledge are shallow and are things you could know by just being told, no mental process being required. If you type ayomikun.com.ng into the address bar and press enter, you'd

open my website. If you click this you'd see that, and if you click that you'd see this. And by this means we drum a lot of knowledge into our heads, but little or no processing is required. To show us how shallow our knowledge is you'd just have to look at how the media controls people. If truly our knowledge is beyond mere information and something gotten through actual mental processes, people won't be controlled like zombies by the media. The foolish scare caused by this COVID scamdemic is another manifest evidence of the shallowness of the knowledge of people of today. Both doctors, professors, lecturers, and people we could consider intellectuals of our time, were all swept into believing that this scamdemic were a real threat to humanity. The government, police, and armed forces enforced the foolish lockdown. The amount of people who have taken the vaccine is also another way we know how shallow our understanding is. Knowledge is easily attainable, but men and women are swept like crayfishes into the basket of deceptions. We mustn't beat our chest as though we knew anything above the men of great ages of the past.

This Agur showed, by his words, that he was a man of profound knowledge and understanding. Then why did he make such a derogatory proclamation about himself? I ask again, is this some form of show of false humility? If it were that were not humility but vanity. Sometimes you find this show of false humility when people would speak very poorly about their ability just because they wish to win so much praise to themselves. This they achieve by first declaring how poor they are. This has the effect of people bringing down the bar of their expectations, but when they do those things they claimed not to be able to do and yet excel it greatly shortly after, they'd shock the observer and win for themselves more praise. Jesus says, "But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that

bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee." (Luke 14:10). So some, having learnt what Christ says here, take the lower place in supposed humility, yet they do it with the earnest expectation of getting worship. Christ said it for actual humility but they do it with a hope of vanity. Could our man be scheming this sort of vanity? No! Not at all.

Agur, was presenting to us a salient truth in a sublime way. He said he was more brutish than any man not because he was demonstrating a false show of humility. He said so because he meant so. For all these which he possessed, the knowledge of science, of history, of humanity and the course of man, of philosophy, and other deep and profound things, as lofty as they were, are brutishness for there is no knowledge of the Holy in all these. And declaring himself to be more brutish than any man he shows he at least had the profound knowledge that informed him of how little he knew, seeing he had not the knowledge of the Holy. If he said he were more brutish than any man, I suppose the things he presented in his questions had very simple answers that even he, as wise and knowledgeable as he was did not know. It was far beyond reach, yet when it is known, it is but a simple answer.

All the questions he asked were as follows:

1. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?
2. Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?
3. Who hath bound the waters in a garment?
4. Who hath established all the ends of the earth?
5. What is his name, and what is his son's name?

Agur's first question alluded to Moses where he says, "For this

commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." (Deuteronomy 30:11 - 14). Now he says there's no need to wonder about going to heaven to bring the law down. This he says because of the impossibility of it. And reference to this portion was made by apostle Paul when he wrote, "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach." (Romans 10:6 - 8). So we can see that he that descended to earth and ascended to heaven is Christ. This is why it should have been tricky. The first question speaks of Christ, for only in the person of Christ did God both descend to earth and ascend to heaven. Questions 2, 3, and 4, refer to God. And the fifth question refers to both God and Christ. Had these questions been limited to those that referred to God, we could assume he shouldn't have had a problem giving answers to them, but in those times Jesus had not yet been revealed.

So these were hard questions but once the answer is known they become easy. It was hard because it was not revealed to them, but it is so easy that the smallest boy in our Sunday school with just a little catechismal instruction would give answers to these. I once read a story by Mark Twain of a boy who [paraphrased] cheated in a Bible competition organised by a church and won.

Before giving him the award they chose to ask him a simple question to show the congregation how intelligent he is, for if you must win such a competition you must be grounded in scriptures. So they asked the boy the name of the two first disciples of Christ. It was a simple one for someone who had just won a Bible competition but the boy could not answer and started sweating. People thought he was just being shy so comments started coming to him like, "don't be shy," "come on, just tell the congregation," and so on. In the midst of the comments and sweat he mustered enough courage to utter what was in his mind and said, "David and Goliath." Such a person who doesn't pay attention in Sunday school so as to cheat may not know it but the good boys in our Sunday schools will.

So what shall we say if an Agur, about the wisest man in his day, should be whisked away and suddenly find himself in our time, and the news of his arrival spread like wildfire, and everyone, knowing how wise he was, gather to see him from all round the world with much excitement? What would happen if, knowing our own children could answer these simple questions with ease, put these simple questions to him and find that the great Agur of renowned wisdom can't give an answer to what our little infants would recite with utmost ease? What shall we say if he were to say the answer to his questions is, "David and Goliath?" We shall be shocked, break our ribs with laughter and ask, "is this wise Agur? Who can call such an ignorant fellow wise? How was he reckoned about the wisest men of his days?" And we shall conclude that the men of his days were indeed must brutish of all the ages man has been on this earth to have called a brutish Agur wise rather than a brute. So, for this reason, seeing he's ignorant of what even our infants should know, he's right to have said he's more brutish than any man.

But our Agur is a humble and wise man and wouldn't say David and Goliath ascended to heaven and descended. He has already acknowledged that he's more brutish than any man. If he owned up to being the most brutish, he wouldn't give an answer he didn't know, which thing is dishonesty. He was only so wise, extremely wise, and that with a revelational and prophetic wisdom. And this also tells us of the truth in his introductory statement where it says, "The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy..." (Proverbs 30:1). Indeed, when we consider the depth and profoundness of his words and how it has been given direct answers to in the revelation of Jesus Christ, we see that they are indeed words of prophecy.

So what's the summary of all this? If the great Agur, mighty in knowledge and profound understanding in the sciences of life and displaying them to us in his short writing, explaining in the details great and mighty things, if such an Agur would still (in his profound wisdom) call himself most brutish, it means all your sciences, philosophies, and arts, and all, are all brutishness. The things that form true understanding are the questions he asked and where they lead to. The answers to these questions are God and Jesus his Christ and his questions lead us to God and to his Christ. Not having the knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ is what made him more brutish than any man despite possessing profound wisdom in the things that pertains to this life. The real understanding is the knowledge of the Holy. This he openly lamented, "I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy." (Proverbs 30:3). He was plain.

So understanding is knowing God and brutishness is not knowing him. People get deceived that they're civilised and great in learning and understanding when they possess knowledge in certain fields not knowing that all that is brutishness. Pharaoh

professed, "Who is the LORD... I know not the LORD..." (Exodus 5:2). And what happened? He drowned his whole army in the red sea like the brutish man that he was. Now, from my learning it seems to me that one of the places with highest learning was ancient Egypt, and Pharaoh must therefore be exceedingly well learned, but because he knew not the Lord he lost an entire army in the sea. Something even a fool won't do.

All the men of wisdom in the things of this world are mere brutish people. For this reason the apostle Paul could ask, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:20 - 21). So knowledge in itself is mere brutishness if it does not yield understanding. And understanding is primarily the knowledge of the Holy.

It is written concerning Peter and John, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13). They were considered unlearned and ignorant because they possessed not the knowledge according to this world. Despite not being lettered they had the knowledge of the Holy and by this knowledge of the Holy silenced those who supposedly had knowledge so much that they were not able to oppose the words of Peter and John.

Now, it is not like they had the knowledge of the Holy on a plata of gold. It didn't come by them by their lazying around only to have an angel come on them with a celestial mace of

divine knowledge and knock them unconscious on the head with it. They were taught daily at Jesus' feet for years. They kept following when things were hard and others stopped following. In fact some others didn't even start their journey with Christ before they were put off by the kind of things he said. The apostles followed to the end. Jesus came down from above with heavenly wisdom and taught them with all the tact of a wise teacher. They had been taught by him whose words are spirit and life. And by this means they had the knowledge of the Holy. They had understanding.

It is written, "... the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." (Daniel 11:32). See here the importance of knowing God? The knowledge of the Holy enables men to do exploits, for exploits are done with great understanding. The world is seeing so little exploits because of a widespread ignorance of the Holy. Let us as individuals and as a church go in pursuit of the knowledge of the Holy and grow in it for this is understanding.

This Is Eternal Life

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."
(John 17:3)

The knowledge of God and his Christ is not just a casual knowledge of simple catechismal questions and answers. In the verse above we are told that to know God and his Christ is eternal life. So the knowledge of God is beyond the casual

knowledge of the answer of a set of catechismal questions. It is a deep mystery.

We can't separate the understanding that means the knowledge of God and the understanding of the proper comprehension of an information. But we mustn't limit it to proper comprehension alone. To have information about God is to know about him, just like if people were to tell you that there is a scientist called Einstein. To have a proper understanding about God is to properly comprehend the information about him, as if one was to show you the photos of Einstein and the importance of his achievements. But to know God is like knowing Einstein in person and that he knows you too. You guys exchange numbers and get to hang out sometimes. This of course means intimacy with him. Then you know his comportment [talking of an Einstein], strengths, weaknesses, hopes, aspirations, fears, and all. Having a knowledge of God from intimacy with him is knowing God, not merely knowing about God. This knowledge is both understanding and eternal life.

Dr. Selwyn Hughes wrote, “Everyone of us must get hold of the fact that a little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about him…” When we seek him with the whole of the heart, we go from merely knowing about him to knowing him and that is far more blessed than anything we can ever imagine.

At the end of 1st King 17, the Bible says things like "So they feared the LORD, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, which sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places. They feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence." (2 Kings 17:32 - 33). This type of

statement is repeated again when it later says, "So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day." (2 Kings 17:41). They did abominable acts because they feared God. This seems like a contradiction. How can a man fear God and do those very things that will provoke his anger? It's just like saying I'm afraid of my house being burned down so I filled it with explosives and lighted a match. If I do that I'm not in the least afraid of my house being burned down. As a matter of fact I want it blown up. But if I do that because I'm indeed afraid is to be a special kind of stupid. It's a contradiction to do those things and say I do that because I'm afraid of my house being burned down. It's a contradiction to do abominable things and say it is because I fear God. Indeed between verses 33 and 41 it says they did these practices because they feared not God. They knew that there was a God who was displeased and vented his wrath in expelling his chosen people out of their land in the most cruel way, but they knew not that God. They tried to appease the God who was displeased but they knew not how. They thought of ways in which other gods could be appeased and tried to appease the living God the same way, but because they had not the knowledge of the Holy the things they did were an abomination to the God they tried to appease. So the fact is they feared God, but because of their ignorance, they did those things that takes those that don't fear him to do. And the result was that God afflicted them greatly.

Even the fear of God can make us do things that provoke him to anger. These passages of the Bible explain to us how that many practices of today, because they're founded in ignorance, are sinful despite being done as an act of reverence to God. Just the mere desire to do God's will isn't sufficient to make us do his will or to please him. Thorough understanding is required. We

need his revelation. We need to seek to know him and not just seek after doing right over wrong for what is right in our eyes may be wickedness in his sight. If we know his heart and those things that he loves and those things he hates, only then can we truly please him. Only when we have the knowledge of the Holy (not merely about the Holy) can we live a life that is pleasing to him and be productive in his service. The psalmist knowing this said, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart." (Psalm 119:34). Without understanding it is impossible to please God.

Here again we come to the importance of scriptures. By it we possess the knowledge of the Holy. By it we understand, that is in the truest sense of the word. By it we possess eternal life and not apart from it. All the things in this ephemeral world, whether they be nature or the wisest thoughts of the wisest man, may at best tell us that he is, but can't take us to him or give us the knowledge of him. Nothing can bring us to that understanding of his holy Majesty. Only the Bible and the preaching of it can.

God's Promise To Give Wisdom

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."
(James 1:5)

We shall conclude this chapter with a promise from scriptures. Solomon says "All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will

be wise; but it was far from me." (Ecclesiastes 7:23)... Selwyn Hughes wrote concerning this verse, "As Solomon looked for wisdom he discovered that wisdom is not easy to find. Why is that? Because although we have an innate ability to gather knowledge, we cannot be truly wise without the help of God." Therefore we are asked to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). For from him alone comes wisdom. Not just that he works understanding in us, but wisdom, understanding and knowledge come directly from his mouth. It is written, "For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6). "Out of his mouth..." And again it is written, "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." (Job 32:8). Without that inspiration there is no understanding.

Bishop Hilary of Poitiers wrote, "The infirmity of man needs time to review before the true and perfect tribunal of the mind, that which is poured indiscriminately into the ears. Comprehension follows the spoken words more slowly than hearing, for it is the ear which hears, but the reason which understands, though it is God Who reveals the inner meaning to those who seek it." With the revelation of the inner meaning, we shall lack understanding though we spend a lifetime reading and trying to learn.

The Bible gives us the assurance that wisdom can be gotten by simply asking God for it and further assures us of God's generosity. So, let us seek it in faith and in works. Let us give much time to studying our Bible, praying, and reading other books too. And God, by his providence shall guide our path into all wisdom and understanding.

When Jesus had finished explaining what the kingdom of God

was like using the parable of the sower, he gave his audience simple knowledge. However, after the parable it is written, "And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (Mark 4:10 - 12). So after he gave them knowledge only those that came to him after the parable for explanation were given understanding into what the parable meant. He said unto such, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God." Against those that didn't come, he said, "... but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That... hearing they may hear, and not understand..." Now he didn't teach these people because they were his disciples, else we could assume that this understanding is to a privileged people and that it is not earned. But when he said "unto you it is given..." who did he refer to? He referred to those that were defined by the words, "they that were about him with the twelve..." It did not refer to his disciples. His disciples just happened to be in the number. It was as many as came to him for explanation. Wisdom is not to the privileged or chosen but to as many as seek it.

From this event we can see also that knowledge alone is not enough. We need understanding. Let us therefore pray and seek for understanding and God who giveth liberally shall fill us with wisdom and understanding to overflowing. Let us seek wisdom and understanding for this is the first and foremost thing we need to have a successful walk with God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, giver of wisdom and understanding, grant us

true understanding, that intimate knowledge of you. As we seek to walk with you all our days, may understanding guide us each step of the way. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 16: FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."
(Proverbs 18:24)

"And I say unto you my friends..."
(Luke 12:4)

When I was a little boy we travelled a bit with my dad and this saw us experiencing major environmental changes few times. This was mainly in our travel from Nigeria to Pakistan, and from Pakistan back to Nigeria. Being used to our environment in Nigeria, our birth place, adapting to an entirely new environment came with its challenges. Going to Pakistan, getting used to that clime, and returning back to Nigeria also came with its own challenges. Then I later travelled to Niger state in Nigeria for my university program. While there, I changed base at least four times. Each time I left one base to move to another I left a whole world behind. I left house, friends, activities, and much more behind to move to an entirely new place. Sometimes the new place would be better than the old and sometimes the old would be better than the new and these ups and downs aren't really fun. I'm a lover of permanence, stability and monotony in life. But these experiences made me realise one very cogent lesson in life. Each time I move to a new place, it always feels queer, but the moment you start having friends it becomes a home, no matter how far away from home that is.

Even when I move from a better place to a worse place, at first I'd feel like I'm missing the better place, but the moment I start having friends in that place I feel accepted and I naturally adjust to this new place, love it, and wish not to leave anymore. These made me realise the importance of friends. No matter where you find yourself, one of the most important things to you are your friends. Some friends are not as good as others, but I realised that one of the most important things in this ephemeral life is friendship. We are as happy, successful, wise, etc., as our friendships enable us.

Let none assume that I'm overrating friendship or blowing its importance out of proportion. Friendlessness is a major cause of depression and suicide. And God acknowledged the importance of friendship in creation when he said, "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone..." (Genesis 2:18). And militarily speaking, we are only as strong as the allies we have. It is wiser to make friends than enemies.

As I said, there are some friends that are better than others and there are others worse than others. So it is not just any human being that is worthy of being friends with. There is a Japanese proverb that says, "a wise enemy is better than a foolish friend." How true. There are some friends which are worse than wise enemies. For this reason we must choose our friends wisely.

Now, the Bible says, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24). For a friendship to be successful, we must be careful not just about having good friends but we must also prove ourselves to be good friends too. This verse also tells us that there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. Jesus is that friend. When choosing a friend there is no better friend

than Jesus.

John Newton (1725 - 1807) wrote a beautiful hymn on this subject that presents this truth most beautifully. The first verse goes thus.

"One there is, above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end:
They who once His kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love!"

The full hymn expresses the thought of friendship with Jesus most beautifully. In fact I recommend that the reader should pause a while, sing the full hymn meditatively before proceeding.

Now as we continue talking about friendship with Jesus. This is of utmost importance for how can we walk with him of whom we are not friends? We were taught from the very early stages of life to sing, "I love Jesus, I love Jesus, he's my friend, he's my friend..." This is very good, but we were scarcely taught about what friendship with Jesus meant. We were taught in a way as if friendship with Jesus relied solely on our choice. As if to say we are in a state of friendship with Jesus the moment we call him our friend. And I assure you, brothers and sisters, that calling Jesus a friend is a very easy thing to do. Too easy to constitute a valid friendship.

My question therefore is, does every friendship not stand on account of the consent of the two parties involved? Does it take only the choice of one party to start friendship within the two

parties? Is it not written, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Certainly the two must give their consent to that friendship before they can be considered friends.

It is just like when a rough, rascally looking boy with an appearance that shows no trace of a moral bearing or common sense, coming to the house of a tender and godly girl from a godly family and calling her his friend says, "I came to see my friend Dorcas." There probably won't be right words for the questions that this request would raise in their minds should they hear this for all the shock. They'd say, "what? Where? How?" and all that won't suffice. That is how it is when people call Jesus their friend without knowing what it means to be a friend of Jesus. He'd probably ask the same questions in shock, "what? Where? How?" He knew such ridiculous declaration of friendship to him would abound and he quite plainly prophesied about those who would think they were his friends without qualifying to be called one, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41). He has denied them in advance.

So why do people go about singing and declaring that Jesus is their friend without proper consideration as to whether he himself accepts to be in that friendship? If we have not agreed and made friends with Jesus in a way that he himself calls us his friends, then we should know that we are not his friends. We must meet his conditions before we can consider ourselves his friends. What condition or conditions do we have to meet?

The Choosy Christ

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you..."
(John 15:16)

Christ is no beggar. In my school days I had this bad habit of losing my pen and when I needed to write I'd be forced to ask around for someone with a spare pen. One day I got one that had a problem of some kind (can't remember anymore) and I started finding fault with it, then the teacher said to me in a tone of irritation, "a beggar has no choice." She was right. If someone relies on begging he must be satisfied with whatever he gets or whatever comes to him. He can't really complain because whatever he gets is but a favour. But when he's no beggar he has a choice and can choose. The better his state and affairs the more choosy he can become. Christ is no beggar. He's not begging for friendship. The world of worlds are his. The host of angels are his. He's surrounded by Cherubs and Seraphs, and shall he beg mortals who are but dust and ashes for friendship? No! Christ is no beggar and he makes it clear in his words and actions. He is choosy because he's no beggar and is in a prosperous state and owes no man anything. He is not bound to accept our friendship because our friendship is no favour to him. Let no one insult Christ by coming to him as though the choice of friendship with Christ were his to make.

Jesus says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you." (John 15:16). Friendship with Jesus is founded on his choosing us not on our choosing him. This choosing is dependent on the conditions he

gives.

Jesus, through his life and teachings, show that he's not the type of person that accepts everyone into his company. He's not a super mister nice guy. He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:21 - 23). Here people are trying to come into his kingdom but he flatly turns them down.

Also, it is written, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." (John 2:23 - 25). He wasn't mister everybody's friend.

In his days people tried to join his company, but he never accepted people just because they showed interest in being in his company. It is written, "And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead." (Matthew 8:19 - 22). Apart from this, it is written, "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow

me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." (Matthew 19:21 - 22).

And even the fact that he still had much followers despite these didn't seem to go down well with him. At one point he drove them all away by telling them the truth in a very unpalatable way so much that it is written, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:66). All left him except the twelve. There was no reason for him to have done this if he were not choosy, what did he gain in speaking that way? He definitely did that deliberately with the singular purpose of chasing them all away. It is not all that call him a friend or desire to be his friend that he admits into his company.

In his unpalatable speech as men were contemplating to leave him, he said to them, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (John 6:61-62). In other words he says, "I could as well leave this world back to heaven and lose nothing. If you wish to leave, leave. I'm not bothered." He's not like many pastors of today who are afraid of members leaving them. Of course they're that way because their members feed them. They're beggars and so they have no choice. Any person, no matter how depraved, is accepted by them. Christ is no beggar.

If only people knew the choosiness of Christ they'll imbibe the manner of evangelism that never encourages their members to bring unconverted people to church. When people do this they invite people who Jesus has utterly rejected. Thus they may dwell with us and play along all the while not having the regeneration that Christ gives. In the end they'll do so much harm to the body of Christ. It is best to go out into the world

and preach and let Christ draw to himself those who he himself has chosen. We too must be choosy in bringing people to his church, and do our evangelism in a way that it is only those who he draws to himself in his choosiness that will join our fellowship.

It is written of the days of the blessed apostles, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47). They didn't take the choice of church membership away from the choosy Christ. He was still choosing from heaven those that would join his church. He added not just everybody but as many as should be saved. And at a time he also did things that would keep people away. It is written, "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things... And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them." (Acts 5:11 - 13). You can see the workings of his choosy hands in everything. Just like when he was in the earth you can see handiwork, there was a time he did something that drove everybody away, and by the working of the Holy Ghost, he drove men away by what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. Nobody dared to join them again. However, it is written immediately, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." (Acts 5:14). Did you see that? Believers were added to the Lord of both men and women. BELIEVERS. Not pagans looking for prosperity and divine favour.

Today in the church you'd see prostitutes, harlots, fraudsters, cheats, sons of Belial and daughters of Jezebel everywhere. Do you think pastors are not aware of the calibre of evil people they have in their congregations? They are aware but being beggars that can't be an issue provided they're giving their offerings. It is not surprising that many sermons in church are

sermons directed to fornicators, adulterers, thieves, swindlers, etc., but particularly fornicators and adulterers. While it is understandable to preach such sermons in church particularly for the sake of those who were born in Christian homes, raised in the church but have failed to come to Christ for regeneration, I believe there'd be far much less reasons to be preaching about fornication and adultery if we had let Christ do his choosing himself. By this I mean we go out to preach the word, not to just go out into the world and invite people, sinners, devils and all, to church. We preach, and those whose heart the Lord touches and has appointed to salvation will join our fellowship.

My mum, speaking once in a women's gathering in one of the foremost churches that originated from Nigeria, condemned indecent dressing, and the wife of the general overseer flared up saying that if anybody has anything to say about dressing they should say it to people individually and privately, not on the pulpit. Do you think she was interested in decorum? Of course not. She was just speaking as the wife of a beggar. Now my mum had seen the widespread indecency in dressing and thought it needed to be addressed, but it infuriated the wife of the grand beggar. It's a shame.

In John 6, when the bread seekers had all left Christ for his unpalatable speech, he expressed in joyful and proud tone (being proud of his twelve disciples), "Have not I chosen you twelve?" (John 6:70). Here again he makes a statement that he was the one who chose the twelve. He chose them and so they remained. He didn't choose the others and so they left. Two things this inform us of. One, he has a choice and isn't under any form of pressure, whether from within himself or without, to accept the friendship of all men. Two, he chooses only loyal people and in his wisdom is able to discern who indeed is loyal before

choosing them. And so it is written, "many are called but few are chosen."

It is written, "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." (Luke 6:12 - 13). Before he chose the twelve, he prayed all night, and in the morning he selected the twelve. The selection was a painstaking effort. If he were in our days Jesus would have been called an antisocial person. He doesn't seem to enjoy the company of people. He rejected some when they sought his company and those who were already in his company he drove away. The few he chose to always be with him were so painstakingly and prayerfully selected. How then shall we assume that we could become friends with Jesus, who is so fastidiously selective, by just singing that he's our friend? How can we think we are his friends by just our mere decision or desire to be his friends. To think that Christ has no say in whether you are his friend or not is down right disrespectful. All such who are so deceived and don't seek to know what shall make them worthy of his friendship have been denied by him in advance.

But why is Jesus this way? Because, as we have seen, he's a jealous lover. A jealous lover makes his demands and would be careful to choose faithful friends. That is why he places down his condition saying, "Ye are my friends, if..." (John 15:14). No serious lover would not give conditions to his prospective object of love. The conditions are not because he hates these prospective objects of his love or wishes to burden that object with an unnecessary burden, but because he wants that love to be sweet and worthwhile. He'd rather not have a friend than have unfaithful ones. It is for this reason he says, "He that

loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37 - 38). So he's this way because he wants to walk with worthy people, not people of little worth.

But did Jesus not say, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37)? Yes all that come to him he shall in no wise cast out. But this coming is not by the mere declaring that Jesus is our friend. He says it is those that the Father gives to him that shall come to him. This coming refers to God's divine providence and ordaining. And such that come to him must meet his conditions because the Father had preordained them to meet the conditions of Christ.

But does it mean friendship with Jesus is unattainable to everyone? No. It is just that there are conditions attached. That is why he says, "Ye are my friends, if..." (John 15:14). If it were unattainable or that he wishes to render it unattainable he'd not give conditions. We all just have to meet those conditions. A person who sets stringent conditions to a thing is someone who must have carefully thought about the thing and wishes to ensure there won't be any hitches. Yes I know some people make stringent conditions over nothing worthwhile just because they're silly and wish to show how stringent they can be as though stringentness for stringentness' sake were something praiseworthy and admirable. But our Christ is wise and is himself wisdom. He only wants a sweet friendship with us. That is why he has conditions, and that is why he turns people away. This, rather than having the effect of driving us away, should have the effect of drawing us to him but with understanding. Let us just meet

his requirements and draw close to him for a loving relationship with understanding. "Ye are my friends, if..." (John 15:14). It is that "if" we shall be looking at shortly.

Obedience

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."
(John 15:14)

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments..."
(1 John 5:3)

Simple and complete obedience is what qualifies us to be Jesus' friends. Simple because it is an unquestioning obedience. Complete because our obedience is to do WHATSOEVER he commands us. Obedience is the most important of the things that makes for a successful walk with God. I only chose to treat understanding before obedience because understanding must precede the pursuit for obedience, else in pursuing obedience without having a right understanding of God and his will one will only be doing those things he neither commanded nor approves of, as we have seen in the previous chapter of those sacrificed to idols in their attempt to please God. As Lord Francis Bacon says in his book "The Advancement of Learning," "Not that every scrupulous or superstitious prescript is effectual, no more than every straight way is the way to heaven; but the truth of the direction must precede severity of observance." So understanding must precede the pursuit for obedience and all the things I treat after obedience are only as it relates to obedience

or aids it. So I could as well say all that is needed for a successful walk with God is a simplistic and complete obedience to God.

It is written, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:25). The looking into the perfect law of liberty, the retention of it and the understanding of it must precede the doing of it. Herein is the harmony. The hearing alone can't make a man blessed, understanding can't be without first hearing, but understanding alone can't make a man blessed too, and the doing isn't possible without the understanding. The doing is that which makes a man blessed but the doing must flow from understanding.

Just as we started by saying that love is the source and sustaining factor of a successful walk with God, another thing that flows naturally from this love is obedience. Obedience is that mark by which we can know that we love God. Obedience is that mark by which we can know that we are the friends of God. That is why the apostle John in his epistle wrote saying, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments..." (1 John 5:3). Refusal to keep his commandments is to fail to love him.

People only struggle with obedience because of the lack of love for God. It is written, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3). If they are not grievous then why should any struggle to keep them? It is written about his commandments, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him,

and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good." (Deuteronomy 10:12 - 13). By this statement he shows that the commandments of God are not burdensome. And again, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). The commandments of God are simple and concise. The rest of the things are lengthy because they are explanations for the willing man to follow those simple commands which are not burdensome.

Had they loved God, obedience would be a cheerful thing to do. The man who struggles to obey God or wrest the idea of having to obey God and his Christ needs to ask himself that salient question, "has God offended me?" And doing this he ought to accept the offer of reconciliation from the Lord his God.

In today's church, there is a lot of argument about what is right and wrong not because what is right is not glaring but because people not willing to obey God's commandments seek an excuse to disobey. A lot of women today seek to dress in the manner and fashion of pagans whereas the Bible has clearly spelt out how we ought to appear, but because of the lack of the will to obey, they keep giving excuses why they ought to behave and look like pagans. Foolish pastors and church leaders, willing to keep such members for the love of money, present reasons contrary to scriptures why it were okay for Christians to behave and look like pagans. So for the lack of love and the consequent lack of will to obey they dispute over indisputable things.

It is written, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." (Isaiah 41:8). God

called Abraham his friend on account of this, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." (Genesis 18:19). It was also based on the knowledge that his apostles both do and shall do his will that Jesus said to them, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:15). Jesus revealed all things to his disciples because they did according to his will. If we too must enjoy Christ's companionship and consequent revelations, and eternal bliss, we must obey him completely.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “... to approve of falsehoods as if they were true, so as to err involuntarily, and to be unable, owing to the resistance and pain of carnal bondage, to refrain from deeds of lust, is not the nature of man as he was created, but the punishment of man as under condemnation.” Obedience to God must be according to the way he demands obedience. Seeing nothing wrong with what he forbids is not sinning in ignorance but is a punishment under condemnation. The mark that a sinner is condemned is not so much in the sin as it is in the sinner not seeing what is wrong with his sins. And seeing nothing wrong with his sins he shall continue therein until he is absolutely damned.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine also wrote, “who can say that Christians ought not to be observant to serve the one God with religious obedience, not to worship an idol, not to take the name of the Lord in vain, to honor one’s parents, not to commit adulteries, murders, thefts, false witness, not to covet another man’s wife, or anything at all that belongs to another man?

Who is so impious as to say that he does not keep those precepts of the law because he is a Christian, and is established not under the law, but under grace?" To be dribbling here and there about and against obedience is outright impiety. The Bible must be obeyed in the simplicity with which it comes.

It is written, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3). Here Jesus is talking about simplicity in obedience, meaning obey the Bible as you read it. I have noticed that we now have a new set of Christians, I call them the Ultra New Testament Christians. They believe that we have come to another dispensation where even the New Testament does not apply. They coined funny interpretations of scriptures. For example, they believe that the command we have in the New Testament that women should not speak in churches or even ask questions does not apply to us in this age. In fact they believe that nothing in scriptures apply to us any more. They only care about promises of blessings, protection, prosperity, etc. In doing so they wrest with the commands of God. Oh foolish mortals.

All these points to the fact that reformers in their keen acute spiritual perception knew that the Bible is written for the simple and even unlearned. It therefore requires simple trust in scriptures and equally simple obedience to it. We don't need knowledge of Greek, or Hebrew, Aramaic, and all, as some are trying to lie to us. I often hear people say things like, "before you can truly understand the Bible you need to study the Hebrew and Greek concordance..." If you read these things thinking you're getting some deeper knowledge, you're merely understanding what the authors of these concordances want you to believe, not what God says. But the Bible as we have it in

the King James Bible, is all we need. Read it, pray about it, and obey it in simplicity. Don't let anyone obfuscate its truth by their foolish sophistries.

It is written "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:3 - 6). It is the doing of his commandments that makes us to be in him. As said, to do his commandment requires that we first know it. So we must be ever in the habit of seeking to know his will more and more and seek the grace to do them completely.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, "it will be sin in the man who lives by faith ever to consent to an unlawful delight, — by committing not only frightful deeds and crimes, but even trifling faults; sinful, if he lend an ear to a word that ought not to be listened to, or a tongue to a phrase which should not be uttered; sinful, if he entertains a thought in his heart in such a way as to wish that an evil pleasure were a lawful one, although known to be unlawful by the commandment, — for this amounts to a consent to sin, which would certainly be carried out in act, unless fear of punishment deterred.)" As the commandments of God must be kept in simplicity, so must it be kept in totality. There are no big sins or small sins, as Dr. Selwyn Hughes wrote, for there is no small God to sin against. If God is a great and mighty God, then every act of disobedience against is a grave act of disobedience. That is why it is written, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also,

Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." (James 2:10 - 11). In that he said "he that said... also said," he pinned the fault as an offence against the person of God and not a mere breaking of his commandments.

Choosing to obey some commands and refusing to obey others is to be like Saul who was selective in his obedience to God's commands. I explained this in my book titled "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE OF SACRIFICE." We destroy things that are base and unprofitable to us, then give ourselves excuses for keeping the perceived profitable ones. When we become selective in our obedience to God like Saul and return with vain fat sacrifices that are nothing compared to simple obedience, we shall only hear, the kingdom has been taken from you. May God help us not to do that which will take the kingdom of God away from us in Jesus name. Amen!"

I like a post I once saw on Facebook which said, "going to church does not make you a Christian, it only means you go to church." I know people whose Christian devotion has been summarised to simply mean going to church. To them that is the whole and sole essence of the Christian life. But obedience is the whole and sole essence of man's creation, and particularly the whole and sole essence of the Christian man. That is why the wise King Solomon summarised it this way, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Do you want to be his friend? Keep his commandment. Not that we merit his friendship when we keep his commandment, but they who he chooses are those to whom the Father has given a

heart to obey his commandment. It is just like the grace and work argument. For obedience naturally brings laws into the picture, for commands and laws are near absolute synonyms. His choosing us is grace, our obedience is founded on that very same grace. Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “the law, holy and just and good, is neither grace itself, nor is anything rightly done by it without grace.” We can't rightly obey Christ without his choosing us.

So dear brothers and sisters, let us obey Christ in simplistic obedience. And by this means we shall find ourselves more and more in an intimate friendship with him. When we obey him we won't need to struggle to draw close to him, he himself would draw close to us. He is that friendly.

The Sublime Love Of Christ

"Jesus... having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."
(John 13:1)

So what manner of person would be this choosy and despite being so choosy would give a set of commandments for those who want to be his friends to fulfil first? That may sound like a person with ego and ego related complexes right? It possibly can look that way but that is so far from the true nature of Christ. And it is a rule that when we study the Bible and perceive something contradictory, it means we haven't understood it well enough. We must patiently continue studying the Bible for answers with an open mind until the seeming contradiction is

demystified.

The first thing is that ego is very contrary to his own declaration about himself so that is completely out of the picture. He says, "I am meek and lowly in heart..." (Matthew 11:29). He also says, "For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth." (Luke 22:27). So meek is he that he's willing to serve his own servants. The meek and lowly Christ would not be so driven by egotistic passions. If there is anything perceived as egotistic then it must be because one has a thwarted perception of his person.

As said, Christ is not interested in a casual friendship. All that he ever did all proves his sublime love for those who shall be his. And when we flip from page to page of the Gospels in particular, all we see is love at its sublimest state. From coming down to our world, dying on the cross, and everything in between and beyond all prove this. Beyond his mere utterances concerning his meekness and lowliness, he demonstrated his humility and love when he took a towel and water to wash the feet of his disciples as servants do (John 13:1-11).

Beyond this, even in the promise of what shall be in eternity, he says, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." (Luke 12:37). He promises that though they be servants, he as Lord will prepare himself and personally serve them. This is not a servile love or something done as recompense. Rather it is a loving service. It is that service you render not for gain or coercion but because you love someone so much. Sublime love yearns to serve and find much relish in

serving the object of its love. A person suffering from egotism can't make such a promise and definitely can't relish in the thought of it.

His love is also evidently seen in this statement, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2 - 3). His sublime love also led him to the service of going to prepare a place for his own. This too is service.

At this point in my life, as I write these lines, I am preparing for a married life, I see myself trying to prepare a place for my future family and I can say it's one of the most loving things to embark on such an endeavour to prepare for the comfort of others. Of course I'll share in the comfort and may even be the major benefactor of whatever is prepared, but it were far less necessary to be so bothered about it if one did not have a future family in mind. The life of a single man is very easy and he could possibly exist even without a home. Christ lived that way. He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20). So a man can exist well without a home, but he can't possibly do that having a family. Christ (unlike me) doesn't have a need for a place because worlds of worlds are his, but he goes to prepare a place specially for us. There is so much love in such a loving service.

Even in the seemingly hidden, little, and insignificant things, his sublime love still shines out radiantly. In the parable of the weeds which Jesus gave in Matthew 13:24-30, I didn't really get to understand the logic behind the good man asking his servants

not to take out the weed and preferring that they left them till the time of harvest until I began to do gardens myself. I realised that the essence of not wanting the weeds out is that the good man didn't want anything to hurt the plants. Weeding out tares could cause shock to the plant though leaving them would work against a bountiful harvest. So he loved his plants so much he could forgo a more bounty yield just because he doesn't want to cause them any shock.

You know, when I think about all these feminist movements and hear the activists talk, I see that most of them are just people who can't just get themselves to truly love. They have a problem with submission and service. It is in such a state of character tragedy that the real egotism lies. And funny enough, it has been proven that women have a bigger ego than men, this despite the assumption that men exclusively have ego problems. When we understand the anatomy of ego we shall see that being cautious about friendship, setting conditions, and expecting obedience has nothing to do with ego. What it shows rather is that you are really in search of who to give yourself over to in a loving relationship and you wish to be sure such a person or people are worthy of such a loving relationship, that both you and them may experience joy to the fullest. Christ wants to give his all. So, when he talks about people not being worthy of him it is not done of vanity but of sublime love. He is a true lover that wants to lavish his love on the dear objects of his love. When we see his choosiness and his conditions, it can be erroneously considered to be done out of vanity, but when we reconcile it with his declaration of meekness and lowliness of heart, as well as his eagerness to serve, we can then see that truly everything was born of sublime love.

It is foolish not to be choosy about one's companionship. You

must of course have seen instances of angelic women being married to wife beaters, and men as gentle as doves marrying women that are like dragons. They could set a house on fire with their words. While we must have sympathy for people who have found themselves in such a state, when you study whatever led to such a union you will almost always see loads and loads of foolishness in the whole thing. They were not choosy enough and when they're choosy the criteria for their choices were drawn in foolishness and often vanity. I've seen women who say the reason why they married their husbands was because he was always wearing a white suit. How quaint! Others would say the man they'll marry must own a mansion at a rich district, and others will say this and that. I once read a book on ancient practices of advertisements titled, "A History of Advertising from the Earliest Times," by Henry Sampson, in which I got to realise that in old times people got spouses by adverts and there were a lot of amusing adverts on marriage and marriage issues. It is written in the book, "A lady advertises her desire to obtain a husband with "a Roman nose having strong religious tendencies." A nose with heavenly tendencies we can imagine, but even then it would not be Roman."

I also once saw a joke that a woman, wishing to marry a super wealthy man, was praying earnestly that God should give her a God fearing Yahoo Boy. Just so you know, Yahoo Boys are a type of fraudsters in Nigeria and they are known to have a lot of money. The point is their eyes are so fixated on money and material things that what they seek can only be found in a person who has the combination of being God fearing and being a fraudster simultaneously. They know the importance of being God fearing, but God fearing people who make money by honest sweat may not be as wealthy as their eyes covet at the age when most young men get married. Having such avaricious

cravings they're lured into the traps of evil men. For this reason even if the Devil came in the flesh dressed in white suit, having a nose with strong heavenly tendencies, or appearing as a God fearing fraudster, they'll consent to marry the Devil. Then the man in white suit would transform later into a wife beater. Christ will not be so foolish as to take chances with the matters of his companionship. He is not only choosy, but has set right the criteria for his choices by his infinite wisdom so much that no God fearing fraudster can make it into his company.

How many times have you heard of guys who come together for some brilliant partnership only to get dissolved again. When I was a little boy, there were a number of music groups we used to love, but over time they all got dissolved and stopped singing together. Not that they lost interest in the music career, but they often had misunderstandings that would mean they can't sing together anymore. Many of these people still keep singing, but they do it alone. This also happens in business partnerships, and almost in all areas of life. Even pastors pull out of a church to start their own church. All these speak of lack of understanding among parties and comprehensive agreement at inception. Christ would not be in such a futile partnership.

It is because of the foolishness that characterises the selection of a life partner that gave birth to the saying that goes, "love is blind." But Christ is not blind. If others are blinded by love yet Christ though he be the man of love is not blind. He sees well enough to choose and choose rightly. It is written, "... they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." (Revelation 17:14). They are first called, then they're chosen, and those that are chosen are faithful. All the faculty of the reason are employed in choosing those that belong to him. He is so meticulous about this whole thing that he came down in person

to seek out his loved ones and charted a way to heaven in such a way that only true love can see you through. Such is the sublime love of Christ.

Accepting The Lordship Of Christ

"Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am."
(John 13:13)

Having hopefully cleared the issue of suspicion about egotism we can now talk about his lordship for his friendship cannot be differentiated from his lordship. The conditions that friendship with him requires obedience to him should naturally inform us that to be his friends we are called to accept his lordship. It is a package where you can't choose one and leave the other. But isn't that being bossy? I disagree. He could have come upon us as Lord alone, but he approaches us for friendship without relinquishing his lordship. That is absolute meekness at its best.

So, the call to come to Christ is a call to come under his lordship. We must bluntly acknowledge that this is another cause of offence. We have said that many don't wish to come to God because God has offended them. Some are not aware of the offence, but deep down in the subconscious, God has offended or is offending them. For this reason they won't come to him. At that time we posed a personal question, "has God offended you?" Here and now, I ask you the reader, in the very same words of Christ, "Doth this offend you?" (John 6:61). Does the invitation to come under his lordship irritate you? Ask yourself this personal question, and examine your heart for its response

then let's proceed.

People don't like being under the authority of another. Every man likes to be his own lord. Men and women alike are averse to being subject to another. This is a major cause of divorce. Many women go into marriages and would like to be called "sweetheart" and "honey," they like the blessedness of having a family, but they don't like the idea of having their husbands as lords. And for this reason being subject to their husbands as the Bible commands is so so hard. Much of the problems of a home boils down to this lack of the will to be subject to another. Outside the home, we see this proclivity of man in almost every sphere of society. Except there is a loss to incur or a benefit to lose for doing so, people would not be subject to another on any ground. People live under the rule of law because ideally the law protects and punishes. Else none will be subject to it. And despite all the benefits of the law, many still live in flagrant disregard of it.

On this grounds many also dislike the authority and lordship of Christ. Being offended in this (often subconsciously) makes men to distance themselves from him. But his lordship is on friendly terms. And that is why, for those his blessed disciples who did his will and his Father's will, he said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:15). So, his friendship and his lordship is a package deal and not a coy of him trying to use his friendship as bate to shove us under his lordship. As though a man would invite people to be his friends and bring them to his house, but when they arrive he starts saying things like, "welcome, welcome, welcome guys. Em, you over there, if you're my friend go wash my dishes. And you, go

wash my clothes. You, mop the floor. You are not worthy of this friendship if you don't do these things." Contrary to that, the lordship of Christ is put first, not his friendship, that we may be friends on right terms and have an eternal hitch free relationship. And, while we serve him here, the eternity which we shall spend with him is not about service but about reigning with him as priests and kings.

There are times when you must retain a position of leadership because you know that it is in the best interest of those you lead. If you leave that post and other hypocrites and greedy people occupy that position, it will be to the harm of others. So while you retain that position against the wish of those who desire otherwise, as if it were for your own interest, it is expedient that you retain a leadership position for the good of those you lead. If Jesus would not be the head of his church, who will? Who would better be Lord if not the meek and lowly Jesus? I do not say this that he rules by force and imposes his lordship, but I say it to point out that it is for our good that he's our Lord. Our existence would be horrible if we have any other apart from the meek and lowly Christ as Lord.

What are the things that Jesus demands of us as our Lord? The foolish preachers of today have abused the name of Christ to extort their congregation. They claim Jesus requires a tenth of everyone's profit and other humongous monetary demands they make. But that is not true. I won't go into all that here. The things that Jesus demands is nothing but to be holy in the sight of God, to deal with our neighbours fairly and truly, and to devote our time to seek the salvation of all men. He's not asking you to pay his bills, or to donate money for him to live a luxurious life. It's absolutely nothing about him. It's all about you and others. If he needed service for his own interests he has

angels and archangels at his service, shall it be mortal man that he shall approach to pursue his interests? We mustn't understand the lordship of Christ by what we see in the world. But being your Lord, his holy will must govern your life.

In the Old Testament, we can find some things that make it seem as though God was seeking to be enriched by the many sacrifices he required of the Israelites, as though the many sacrifices somehow by mysterious ways filled his stomach. But the Lord God made it clear that this is not the case. He says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats." (Psalm 50:12 - 13). All what God requires from us as our Lord in summary is, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). Everything is all about us. It's all about humanity. And not so much about him.

Furthermore, love craves the rule of one's object of love. It was Frances Ridley Havergal who wrote about her blessed hymn "O Master, at Thy feet" saying, "O Master! It is perhaps my favourite title because it implies rule and submission; and this is what love craves. Men may feel differently, but a true woman's submission is inseparable from deep love." This has been found to be so true even before coming across these words. In accepting his lordship we are owned by him and it is in his giving himself to us and for us that we own him. The man therefore that shies away from his lordship is a man with a nonexisting or epileptic love. He has given himself to us, why not we give ourselves over unto him in a loving friendship?

Jesus is the best Lord a man can have. I ask with John Newton,

"which of all our friends to save us could or would have shed their blood?" The best Lord to be subject to is Christ. Let us therefore draw close to Christ in a loving relationship. When we come to him in obedience, we shall find that which we thought to be a lordship become an absolute friendship. This is what happened to his disciples when he said he shall no more from henceforth call them servants (John 15:15). Jesus is Lord of all the earth, but he loves us so much that he can't seem to help being our friend. Let us embrace our dearest friend and heed all his commands.

Jesus said, "But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17:7 - 10). This too, rather than showing bossiness, it shows friendliness. He is a friend that wants to have endless delight in us. Do you know how distasteful it is to have someone, due to poor judgment, come up to you and say I have lifted a pin as a friend now you have to lift a mountain, as though a mountain were a pin. That happens a lot in friendships and partnerships and it is about the most distasteful thing to see.

I once watched the tv when two of our celebrated female footballers were interviewed. At that time they had stopped playing due to injuries or something. So during the interview as they were soliciting for financial assistance from the country they

said, "we have served the the country, it is now time for the country to serve us." I was shocked and I think I remember the interviewer expressing shock too. That was so repulsive. They played excellently well for the country no doubt, but making such a demand from the country on account of their having played well for the country was repulsive. If you had a friend who would start making demands on account of one favour or the other you would feel offended and that relationship would grow sour.

This nonsensical type of blunder is what Christ is trying to avoid in his relationship with his own. He doesn't want any of his friends to come up to him and say, "Lord, I didn't tell a lie the whole of the day, now you must give me riches." Or, "Lord, I have returned a valuable good that was lost to the owner, now you owe me a lot for doing your commands." Christ doesn't want to hear that and has put it forward as a condition for being his friend, so he can always delight in you and to ensure that the relationship never grows sour.

Furthermore, as we have said, whatever he commands is for our good and not for his, but because it is his commands that we keep, it will tend to look as though we are doing him a favour. True, the things he commanded us requires work to be done, and if he commanded it and work is required and that work is done and rightly done, then it is in a way like a favour requiring thanks. But who benefits from the work? Christ? No, but fellow men. But if he died to save men, then our preaching his words gets them to come to him for salvation, we do work for him. And when we work to edify those who are already saved and labour to ensure they're in the faith therefore ensuring that his sacrifice on account of those souls is not wasted is to work for him. But at his command did not others not work to

get you to come to Christ if you have come to him? They work and so you work also. This is working for one another at his command and all the instruments of this work are provided by him. The work is meaningless without his sacrificing his life. He gains nothing himself and is fully aware of this so much that when people were offended at his hard sermon he said, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (John 6:61 - 62). Meaning his sacrifice was not for his benefit. If those for whom he came to die were offended at his sermon, he could as well go back to where he was before and watch them perish. But love still made him sacrifice his life for our salvation. If all we have done in keeping his command is for ourselves then what right do we have to be making demands of him in doing that which is for our benefit? Such a command to say we have only done our duty after carrying out his commands puts out the foolish presumptions man is prone to. It reflects a sublime love and not bossiness.

When Paul disobeyed the Spirit of God in that he went to Jerusalem when the Holy Ghost instructed him not to, Jesus did not respond to him the way a lord would. Rather he responded the way a friend would. About his disobedience it is written, "And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem." (Acts 21:10 - 12). The Holy Ghost said to Paul by the mouth of many people including prophets, but Paul insisted and went to Jerusalem. He suffered many things

and had himself to blame. Some try to interpret Paul's actions here as a good one born of zeal and fearlessness, and to be in fact of the Holy Spirit himself. Hearing such things makes me wonder how some people read their Bibles. They have developed a womanish affection for Paul that seems to say, "because I love him he can't be wrong." But the Bible is plain that he went against the instruction of the Holy Ghost else the prophets that spoke to him spoke to him under the influence of malign spirits and not by the Spirit of God. Also if they were right the brethren who believed the message and pleaded with Paul all lacked the Spirit of discernment by which they could have discerned that what they heard was not from God. But rather than believe machinations of womanish affections for Paul I'd rather believe the contrary for I never read of a time when the Holy Ghost sent a person on an assignment with zero yield in terms of souls being converted. His trip to Jerusalem and to Rome was not crowned with even a soul. The closest to get converted was Agrippa who said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28). Almost a Christian is no Christian. And though he spoke to Felix for two years he still did not get converted. So such an assignment couldn't have been of the Holy Ghost. Even the motive of his going down to Jerusalem is in question for the moment he stepped a foot where the apostles where it is written, "And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." (Acts 21:19). Notice the emphatic word "particularly" and notice the concluding words, "by his ministry." So it probably was to declare the things accomplished by his ministry. Yes to the glory of God, but by his ministry. But my object is not to dissect the fault of our dear apostle, so I won't go further. However, my focus here is the Lord's response to a disobedient servant. The very next time Christ would appear unto him, here was what he

had to say, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." (Acts 23:11). A Lord bent on exercising despotic lordship wouldn't be this magnanimous to his subject. He didn't pin his fault in his face and mock the futility of his trip. But it is a rare friend, of which Jesus is the best there can be, that can be this magnanimous to seek to comfort a friend who refused to heed his voice. Rather than chide him, he came to comfort him without a trace of anger or displeasure. And not that alone, rather than pin his fault in his face he went further to even commend him saying, "as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." Just to cheer up his disobedient servant he put the futility of his enterprise aside to talk on the testimony which he gave, accepting it from him. Such magnanimity blows my mind. This is Christ, the one friend above all others.

Allegiance To The Rock Of Offence

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."
(John 15:19)

Just a brief one. Mind you, the devotion of Christ to his own does not guarantee a life free from unpleasantness. It is often the mistake of man to think that "if my best friend is the Almighty then nothing unpleasant can happen to me." There are many ways in which people misunderstand Christ and this is one of them. We have said that this was probably what was in the

mind of John the Baptist when he was in prison. He probably thought since Christ the Almighty won't let anything happen to him he challenged the king, but as you can see he was beheaded without Christ doing anything about it though he could if he wanted to. So it is not the will of the Almighty to shield people from ills that would yield good. If it were his will, he would have saved himself and come down from the cross. Even if he didn't want to, he'd have come down when his enemies taunted that he should save himself and come down.

To become a Christian is to accept the friendship and lordship of Christ. This also implies in the words of A.W. Tozer that we accept his enemies as our enemies. And Christ has many many enemies. Alliance with such a man who was so hated so as to be crucified means you will get your own fair share of the hatred. It is in the service of Christ and because of his enemies that unpleasantness can come our way. And sometimes Christ will let you bear it without doing anything about it. So know the Almighty you're befriending.

At all times however, always know that everything you ever go through will end up in your benefit. I'm a living witness of that. His goodness has revealed to me that there are good that can't be without unpleasantness. For this reason, be more careful to make the best use of unpleasant circumstances to develop yourself than you are to get out of it. When hard times come by us, we must make the best use of it. If we understand it well we shall see that hard times are gifts. It opens up a lot of things that were covered and being opened up, it gives us a rare opportunity to study those things that would otherwise be covered.

The Bible is full of an abundance of promises that it shall be

well with you no matter what you go through. That is his promise to you as a dear friend. Not that you will never have bad experiences. He loves his own dearly, and let nothing convince you otherwise. Not even the unpleasantness that happens to you on account of your allegiance to him.

Obedience According To His Own Dictates

"And said unto them, Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order."
(1 Chronicles 15:12 - 13)

We had said that understanding must precede obedience, this is so that obedience may be rightly done. It is a self evident fact that if anything is to be termed obedience then it must be according to the dictates of him that is obeyed. Else it is no obedience. And at any time it is contrary to dictates of him that is to be obeyed and still termed obedience or good it is a way of saying that one is wiser and better than the one he obeys as it is written, "Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?" (Job 35:2). Seeing it is a self evident fact we don't have need to point it out. However, the rate at which Christians do what they like, following their feelings, and calling it obedience is alarming. I suppose that this is because, by the crafty workings of the Devil, people no longer see Christianity as a life lived in obedience to a person, the

person of Christ. Rather some seem to see it as the obedience to a set of laws, an idea, a notion, a church, or a pastor, or to parents, etc. Christ seems to have been blurred out of the picture, else were Christ in the picture, then men should have been more forward to know his will and obey it as he dictates.

Today people tend to push God far away when talking about the commandments that should guide a man's life. Some Christians even talk about universal laws and principles of this and that including the law of Karma which, though is not of Christian origin, means that what goes around comes around. They make it sound as though God has set universal laws in place like a computer program that is executed when certain conditions are met, and having set them stepped back and distanced himself from it. But there are no such things as universal laws in place. God is God, the Maker of all things and the laws that govern them. All acts of disobedience are disobedience and dishonour to him, not a mere going against a set of universal principles. All acts of obedience are an act of obedience to him and an honour to him, not to a mere set of universal principles.

If we must obey God and walk with him as we ought we must revive our view of how his commandments and his person are inseparable. All the times God gives his laws he ever emphasises how it connects to his person. In the Ten Commandments he starts by pointing to himself saying, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 20:2). And all through the laws he gave, from Exodus to Deuteronomy and beyond, he keeps repeating, "I am the Lord."

It is for this reason that it is written, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law." (James 2:10 - 11). The person who keeps the whole law and breaks one is guilty of all because he didn't break one of a set of universal principles, he disobeyed the person who gave that law. When it says, "for he that said," it means all disobedience is a dishonour against the person of God who commanded. So it doesn't matter which door the dishonour came in through, whether through a door of murder or adultery, it is dishonour all the same.

It is written, "Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" (Romans 2:23). Breaking the law is not working against universal principles, it is dishonouring God. His person and his honour is blasphemed in every act of disobedience.

I believe people try to wash down the idea that to do bad is to dishonour God because deep within them they have been disconnected from God by sin. Like when Adam fled from God when he sinned and wanted to be distant from him, so these, knowing the benefit of doing good, don't want it connected to the God they've sinned against. And this subconscious desire to be distant from God is responsible for why some prefer to pray to Mary and to those they call saints, rather than to God and his Christ. I've heard all manner of strange prayers in Christendom. Some pray to the blood of Christ, to the cross of Christ, to the water that flowed from his side, and to his body as a whole for deliverance, rather than to himself. These could only stem from a defiled conscience. The man whose conscience is clean and lively would love to hear the name of his God and Lord, and be grieved by every wrong action done by him as being a dishonour to him whom his soul loveth. He will also draw close to himself

and have his gaze fixed upon and not on some saint or other idols. His obedience is to God himself.

Even in the affairs of men, to break laws is to dishonour those who set the law. Right now I'm living in an estate where there are laws forbidding the rearing of animals within the premises of the estate but some guys flout those laws without any care, even letting them roam freely in the estate and causing damages to other residents. The Bible condemns such an action in which people will let their animals cause damage to anyone in any way and they are to pay for the damages done and add to it a tenth or so. The laws of the land says that is a tort, the builders of the estate in their laws forbad the rearing of animals within the estate, the facility managers of the estate in their bylaws forbad it also, the constitution of the resident association forbad it too, but some people, like animals without the ability to comprehend or reason, flout all these laws. In this one act of letting their animals roam freely they don't just break laws but dishonour and disregard the maker of each and every of these laws they break including their country and the Bible being godless and barbaric people.

It were better to first change a law that isn't suitable by appealing to the reason of the makers of those laws and as many as are affected by it and make it suitable than to flout it while it stands, even if it is not suitable. It will do humanity a lot of good if we bring back to mind that in breaking laws we dishonour the makers of the laws. And in the Christian church and life we must never see the commandments that guide us as mere universal laws set by God.

I think it is for a purpose that sometimes in the lane of history and present affairs of men God chooses to break the tenets of

these so called universal laws to show to us that it is his will that stands not some universal laws. That is why he may choose to prosper even the wicked sometimes and give them upper hand over the righteous as it is written, "All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness." (Ecclesiastes 7:15). In such a case, where is the law of Karma? It's on vacation? No, you can't see it because it is nonexistent. The will of God alone reigns supreme and he himself (not some computerised set of universal laws) rewards all men according to their works. So he says, "... I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:24). He in his very person exercises these things.

For these reasons, he that does not know Christ personally will not be able to obey him as he ought, for obedience is to him and not to mere words. We obey him better when we know him better. In the knowledge of his person we understand his will and in this understanding we do his will and interpret his words through the knowledge of his person. Thus will our understanding of his word be clear and won't be clouded by any prejudices. If however you follow the dictates of your heart or notions then it is not obedience, even when you think it is. In such a case he is not your Lord but you are Lord of yourself.

In the collection of Puritan writings titled, "THE AGE OF PURITANS, Volume 3," One Mr. Edmund Calamy is quoted to say, "it is a maxim in nature, every master must be served according as himself commands." The servant who states to his master how he intends to obey him does not assume his position as a servant but an equal, or even a master of his master. It reminds me of when my mum first got the house help she now

has at the time of writing this, the girl came with her set of rules. It was one of the funniest sights I've ever beheld. We had to take her rules and regulations she came with, threw it overboard, then sat her down to give her our own rules and regulations. So things as strange as a maid wanting to dictate how she shall serve her mistress do happen. People who behave this way have assumed a position of authority over their masters. Though such a servant states in his conditions how he will serve and not how he will reign, he is yet assuming the post of the master for his will has been put above that of his master. Masters can of their free will choose to serve even their servants as we have seen in the case of Christ who both washed his servants' feet and promised to serve them in eternity. So giving conditions of how one would serve is still a thing masters do.

The ruin of many homes today is that many women go into their matrimonial homes bringing a large chunk of their own rules rather than submitting to the rules of their husbands. I know that it is the nature of women not to be content with their estate, but to make things worse I've seen girls and women being actively taught to prove to their husbands that they aren't inferior to them. It makes me wonder what the rationale is in teaching women to learn to challenge their husbands. Is there anything to benefit from such? This to me is just like going to pull the ear of a sleeping dog for no reason. And many men also bring a wife into their homes without defining and laying down their rules. The increasing rate of divorce confirms this because when couples get divorced, it means there are things they can't agree on which they only discovered after declaring to the world in marriage that they are agreed. Such is foolishness. To divorce is telling the world, "hello world, we engaged on this journey foolishly, kindly pardon our foolishness."

Christ will by no means engage foolishly in a relationship. He doesn't relinquish his lordship and his conditions are spelt out with his very invitation. If you aren't okay with those conditions he asks you himself to keep off. He isn't asking you to come with your own rules. You must come to him to accept him as Lord and take your place as a servant. You come to him to hear his dictates and let his dictates form your own rules. I know the heavy pressure infatuation puts people under. As infatuation drives men and women of the world into sinful deeds, it drives moral men and women into hasty marital decisions. Such infatuation they call love but it is not. Christ beheld a person he loved and the first thing he did was put forward rules. It is written, "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." (Mark 10:21). He loved him and the first thing he naturally did was to put forth his rule and that rule drove him away for it is written, "And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions." (Mark 10:22). By his rules he chose who would be his companion and who would not. It will do our homes a whole lot of good if men walked by the wisdom of Christ to choose their spouses by the rules they set forth.

For this reason, a man who wants to live happily in his matrimonial home must, before saying "I do," spell out as much as possible his rules for his home and let that rule be the basis of his union. Because he's not perfect as Christ is perfect his rules can't be absolute and so he should be open to suggestions of his wife-to-be, they should form those rules together and first agree on those before proceeding to get married. And a wife who wants to live happily in her matrimonial home must, before saying "I do," listen to the rules of her husband-to-be and be

sure she's okay with them. If he doesn't present any she should ask for them. They should talk things over before saying I do. So they shouldn't just get into each other's arms without a proper consideration of these things and start looking foolish few years after saying I do. Of course the world of today tries to paint divorce as heroic, especially for women, but divorce only reveals a grade A level of foolishness to so ruin one's own life and happiness by getting married like idiots do.

So rules are important, and submitting to those rules as they are given is necessary for a healthy relationship and a healthy society. Men should have a clear definition of what kind of home they want, and it should be well defined. And women should be more intent on knowing the rules they'd be subject to in their matrimonial home than drawing up their own rules and regulations to bring into their matrimonial homes. Christ wants a healthy relationship with us and for that to happen his dictates must form our rules.

Furthermore, it is the ego in man that makes us see service as an ignominious thing. But serving one another is a glorious thing to do. And to be a servant of Christ is the most glorious thing we can be and indeed beyond glorious. We don't merit it. And as we have seen, love yearns to serve. And on the ground of love service both to God and man is both beautiful and glorious. So beautiful and glorious that Christ does not deign to serve his own in eternity. How glorious it is to be in his loving service here in this world and to serve him for all eternity.

Before the statement of David in the key verses above, the children of God supposed they were doing the will of God only for God to strike Uzzah dead. Why? Because though they supposed they were obeying him and doing his will, they did

not do it according to his dictates. They didn't do this out of cockiness, stubbornness or ignorance as people of today do, rather theirs was because they chose to be innovative in their obedience. The Levites were meant to carry the Arc of the Covenant, but they probably had now learnt the art of using the oxen to bear load. They probably felt like big boys now and didn't see the need to bear the burden of the Arc of the Covenant on their shoulders, so they used the oxen. And God struck Uzzah dead when he had stretched out his hands to hold the Arc when the oxen stumbled. It was a sad sight. It is painful to be celebrating and jubilating in the presence of God and in his name only to be struck dead by the same God. The celebration stopped and the king could not bring the Arc to Jerusalem with him because of fear. However, upon pondering on the judgment of God and the blessing upon the house of Obededom, David learnt the lesson he presented in the key verses which goes, "Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order." (1 Chronicles 15:12 - 13). He learnt the lesson that God must be obeyed "after the due order." And further declared, "Be ye mindful always of his covenant; the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." (1 Chronicles 16:15). By this he and we also learnt reverence for the commandments of God.

On a lighter note, I suppose we should be careful on our use of technology and innovations in our service to God. One major thing I suppose that seems to be off in terms of using tech in our service to God is the use of AI to deliver sermons. AI has the potential to be extremely accurate possessing near unlimited

resources to serve us as a super memory, but we know that the words of our faith are not just mere words, they are spirit and they are life. AI is neither spirit nor does it possess the least of life. The man that must preach the word of God to impart the soul must be born of water and Spirit. This doesn't condemn it outrightly for there should be some way that AI can be of service especially in the areas of study, but I suppose caution should be shown.

I on my own have used AI to generate hymns and I'm surprised at what manner of beautiful hymns AI can generate. We may not call the hymn inspired, though it could be seen as such on account of the idea of using AI to generate hymns to the glory of God being inspired, but it does a good work in generating hymns that both edifies and by which we can worship God.

I can't say one particular thing I can point against the use of AI except what I saw once online that an AI was delivering sermons. I am a bit worried about that though there may not be anything wrong with it too. If the right inspired prompts are inputted, then there may be nothing wrong with the sermon output. However, David, the prophet king, with all the priests and Levites also saw nothing wrong with using an oxen to bear the Arc until Uzzah was struck dead. So we must tread with caution.

In writing a hymn in the past, I have had need of prayer and careful process to bring about the hymn, and I feel by prayer the hymn was inspired, and the psalmist all wrote the psalms by the inspiration of the Almighty, and so did the hymn writers down the ages, but there isn't any need for prayer to type a prompt to generate a hymn. So where does AI get the inspiration from? Not sure, but maybe from the prompts.

Just today, as I write these lines, I asked AI to generate a Christian lyrics for me to the tune of Dirait On, and the theme should be on loving Jesus and desiring his residing presence, not his passing presence, and in seconds the lyrics were set. I intend to use it as the introductory hymn for this book but not sure yet if I can use it. I'm yet to really try it out to see if it goes well with Dirait On. The output in itself may be uninspired, but the theme of loving Jesus and desiring his residing presence is inspired I believe. So I believe the output would be inspired since what inspiration begets must itself be inspired. Those are my thoughts and I'm open to hearing the thoughts of others on the matter too.

It seems to me to be very handy as at this rate, even each chapter can have an accompanying original hymn attached to it. So to outrightly condemn AI for spiritual use may be denying us a very handy tool in our service, but we must be cautious too and prayerful about its use.

Other innovations that I have seen that has been destructive are not tech related. So in general, tech in most parts would be of service to the church. The destructive innovations I've seen are treating the church as a business, using democratic means to appoint leaders and workers in the church, using the system of music the world uses for entertainment in our worship, and a number of others. The church is not a democracy but a Paracletocracy. The rule of the Holy Ghost. In the Bible people were appointed to service by the Holy Ghost and by spiritual men. You can see how the apostles who were spiritual appointed leaders in the church. Such leaders were not elected. So the church ought never to adopt democracy which is a failed innovation of the world. These innovations of democracy,

kingdom business (as they call it), worldly music, and worldly dressing, all came from the world and have already had a devastating effect on the church. Like in the case of Uzzah, God seems to have struck his church dead for we do witness a lot of deadness in the church of today. May God have mercy and revive her. So caution needs to be shown in adopting innovations from the world.

As said, obeying God according to how we like it rather than how he dictates is not crowning him Lord. It is just usurping his post as Lord while lying to him that these things we do to suit ourselves are done in obedience to him. But can God be deceived? Can God be mocked? Never! God does not respect the fact as to whether or not this form of disobedience was done out of ignorance or deceit, his punishment is severe all the same. He struck Uzzah dead though theirs was done in error not in disregard for his commandments. How much more shall he severely strike those who do theirs out of flagrant disregard for God and consequent disobedience. It therefore is only wise to earnestly seek to know his will thoroughly before seeking to do them.

Here again we see the importance of studying the word of God consistently. Many people think that the knowledge they've gotten elsewhere or by experience can help them in knowing how to live for God and serve him, but God states, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8). We therefore must know that our notions must never be relied upon, indeed it must never even be considered, when it comes to obedience to God. If we consider our notions as something to consider in obedience to God they will certainly serve as stumbling blocks. His words alone must guide us.

The Power For Obedience

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."
(2 Peter 1:3)

Now how hard is this command to obey? I do not say it is hard but impossible. When Jesus spoke to the rich young man and asked him to sell all that he had and give to the poor, the young man went away sad. Jesus then said to his disciples, "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:23 - 24). In this case he indeed meant that it is hard to enter into the kingdom of God. Being amazed his disciples asked, saying, "who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25). This informs us also that they had rightly assumed that it is easier for the rich to enter into the kingdom of God. So, it does not just mean that it is hard for only the rich to enter into the kingdom of God, but it is hard for all. Jesus confirmed this when he said, "With men this is impossible..." (Matthew 19:26). Note that Christ says entry into the kingdom of God is in fact impossible. But thanks be to God that the statement ends with these words, "... but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26). By the working of God's Holy Spirit obeying his commands are easy, and they're not grievous. So we need to be conscious of the fact that obedience to God is not hard.

By right reasoning, it is not rational to give a command to creatures who can't keep it. Indeed, going through the Bible, one

may have the opinion that obedience to Christ is really impossible. And I agree. But why should God give us impossible commandments to keep? Because he has given us the power to do the impossible. That is why it is written in 2 Peter 1:3, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." He has given us everything by which we can obey his commandments, that is both the knowledge of his will and the power to do them. This is why it is written, "... his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3).

If one were to read where Christ says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." (Matthew 7:13), it may seem as though what Christ is saying is that it is hard to enter into the kingdom of God. Indeed it is, but that is not what he's saying. He referred not to difficulty but that the way that leads to life is narrow, meaning it is hard to find. It is very rarely popular. On the other hand, the way that leads to destruction is very broad. It is very popular. Everyone is on that way by default and only few can find their way out of it. Leaving the broad way of destruction and finding the way of life is humanly impossible. But finding the way of life, by the leading and working of the Holy Ghost, isn't hard. And it isn't hard to go the whole way into life by the same leading and working of the same Holy Ghost. So it is not the hardness to go in that Christ speaks about here but the fact that the right way is very seldom popular. So when you see preachers pulling a lot of crowds it doesn't mean that they're preaching the truth. In fact the crowd is more likely an evidence of heresy than it is an evidence of truth.

Though the entering into life is easy by the strength furnished us by the Holy Ghost, it yet is still grievous and burdensome to that man who does not love God and to those who are offended in Christ. This is not because it is burdensome in reality, but they have a problem with God, though probably subconsciously, so anything that comes from him would be naturally repulsive to them. Doing what you don't like to do or don't see the benefit of doing is burdensome, and we have said that love makes everything easy. The absence of love makes even lifting a pin to be like lifting a mountain, so the easy yoke of Christ becomes burdensome. One thing that baffles me of how difficult it has become to fulfil God's commandment is how hard it is for women to pray with their heads covered. That is the easiest thing to do, but it is so hard because the love of God is absent, and being absent they wrest that simple instruction with everything they have and compel people to join them in wresting it. The easy command to cover the hair that is as easy as listing a piece of cloth is now as hard as lifting a mountain that some would rather go to hell than do. But when the state of our minds changes, his commands become easy and joyful.

More so, the central focus of this book which we defined as the fountain of all good, love, has a very important part to play here. To keep his commandments is not grievous to as many as recognise his love for us and do love him in return. But it is grievous to as many as do not recognise his love for us and don't love him in return. That, I believe, is the reason why the first and greatest command is this, "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deuteronomy 6:5). If only we start here at the point of love, all other things would flow naturally, easily, and gracefully.

The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8), and since the Bible says, with God all things are possible (Mark 10:17), we can mathematically prove that with love all things are possible. I remember as a young boy I had the desire to be a footballer when I grew up. Being a footballer is not easy. Many don't want to go through the rigours of football drills though they enjoy the game. But to be a footballer drills are essential. However, though it was perceived as something hard, the earnest yearning I had to be a world class footballer drove me on. That which was hard became easy by the love I had for the dream of becoming a footballer. It is the same way with God. The commands that are perceived as hard to obey would become easy when we truly love God and have made peace with him. It is no wonder why the beloved apostle John emphasises so much on love in his epistles.

Apart from our loving God, feeling his love further makes obedience not to be burdensome. This we achieve by bringing to mind the profound love of God in sending his Son to die for us and the sublime love his Son has demonstrated towards us. There was a time when all I experienced from others was lack of compassion, nagging, complaint, and even attempted intimidations. Doing anything was so hard for me. I struggled to do my tasks as I found everything so burdensome. But one day as I sat down alone by the church after an evening service, one little girl came to me looking all delighted to see me and sat closely by me. She asked me my name and asked me many other questions, taking so much interest in me. I was amazed at the beam in her face while we talked and when her little sister tried to join the conversation she shooed her away. I felt so loved and though she was just a little girl and that was the first time I met her though she knew me from afar and had met my

elder bro. Just that seemingly little show of love took a world of load off my shoulders. I felt alive and free. Everything that seemed hard for me became so easy and I did everything happily and gladly. I was just beaming at everyone. At one point I had to pause and wonder at myself as to what had come over me. I was amazed at the effect such simple loving gestures from a little girl could have on me. I realised then that being loved and loving takes the burden of living off our shoulders. And loving God takes every burden that his commandments have on the carnal man of our shoulders.

Now the love that Christ shows us is more than what a little girl can show. It is not just him coming to sit close by us, it is him coming from his throne above, teaching us, then ultimately dying for us. He didn't stop there, he is also interceding for us and is preparing a place for us. How can we witness such love and not gladly seek to know his commandments and gladly obey when once it is known?

Bishop Aurelius Augustine agrees with us when he said, "if in this life, as no religious person doubts, the more we love God, so much the more righteous we certainly are, who can doubt that pious and true righteousness will then be perfected when the love of God shall be perfect?" So love is everything in our walk with God. He who loves God and has come into a loving relationship with him will find that obedience to him is not burdensome. When in this sweet friendship we feel his love for us, it makes it so easy to obey him. We obey him to the same degree to which we love him. If our love is perfect then we shall obey him perfectly. If our love is fifty percent then we shall obey him to a degree of fifty percent. If we don't love him at all, we shall not obey him at all. Let us therefore let the love of God permeate our being and we will obey him gladly and

swiftly.

Faith also plays an important role in our obedience. The Bible says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). It is therefore impossible for the carnal and faithless to please God. But when we believe his word through faith and his power is made available by means of that faith, his commands will not be grievous. 2 Peter 1:4 says, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." He has given us great and precious promises, and by these we become partakers of the divine nature, etc., and with this new nature, obedience is easy. All these we must apprehend by means of faith and so realise that his burden is therefore light and his yoke easy.

Benefits Of Obedience

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."
(1 John 3:22)

"Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."
(Luke 12:37)

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple... Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."
(Psalm 19:7, 11)

Now, we shall look at few of the immense benefits of obedience to God. First and foremost is that we receive whatsoever we ask of him, BECAUSE we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. It is written in 1 John 3:22-24, "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." This of course does not mean that whatsoever we pray for will be done, but having the condition of obedience attached to it it means that every prayer we pray according to his purpose will be done. Obedience makes this possible.

It is written, "The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness." (Proverbs 15:9). Obedience to God attracts his love. As we have seen, when the rich young man came to Jesus and asked him what he shall do to be saved. Jesus gave him a brief instruction on the fact that obedience to God's command is what he required to be saved. But when the man described how he had fulfilled all these commands from his youth, it is written concerning Jesus, "Then Jesus beholding him loved him..." (Mark 10:21). This confirms to us that he loveth him that followeth

after righteousness. What else can be done in exchange for all the love God has shown us, both in our creation, sustenance, and salvation, than to do those things that shall make him love us yet the more? Obedience wins us that love and our walk with him shall therefore become cordial.

Ephesians 5:6 says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." The wrath of God that shall sink the world in destruction is coming on the children of disobedience. Only by obedience do we escape the wrath to come.

Isaiah 59:9-13 says, "Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood." Sin causes obscurity and darkness. Acting according to our own hearts makes us grope in darkness. Lying against God is done by giving a wrong interpretation to his words. We therefore transgress and justify them with our lies. Much of the lamentable things described above are a reality in my country Nigeria for the abundance of our transgression, yet there seems to be none who'd realise that our transgressions are the cause of these things. Christians in other parts should also examine their ways and see if there are transgressions for which

God is bringing judgments upon them. There shall be no respite from these things as long as transgressions continue. God shall be far from us and confusion shall be all over us. Only by obedience can these things be avoided.

In his Anti-Pelagian writings, Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “We must first bend our necks to the authority of Scripture, in order that we may arrive at knowledge and understanding through faith.” To these sublime words of Augustine agrees the words of our Lord Jesus for he says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:17). Another benefit of obedience is that it is the source of true knowledge and understanding through faith. Without this we shall just be reading the Bible as a piece of literature. Herein is another paradox. We need understanding to obey God, and yet it is by obedience that we come to a yet more perfect knowledge and understanding that is unattainable without a preceding obedience. When Christ says, "he shall know of the doctrine," that is, having done the will of God, it means this is a knowledge and understanding we can't have except it be first preceded by our obedience to God. Obedience must precede true understanding (which is a gift to the obedient). So it's a cycle. Understanding is needed for obedience, then obedience gives more understanding which enables more obedience, and so on and so forth.

It is written, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever." (Psalm 111:10). This further stresses the fact that obedience must precede true understanding and wisdom. The fear of God and the consequent obedience to his words is the beginning of wisdom and by it there is good

understanding. Understanding is innately good, but to further qualify it by the word "good" emphasises the profoundness of the understanding that comes through obedience to God.

The reason why many know so little about God is lack of obedience. Had they obeyed the blessed Lord, he would have manifested himself to them. They should have known the beauty of the knowledge of God, the awesomeness of his mysteries and have been in the realms of divine fellowship with the Holy One. So should they have been guided into ALL truth. But the love of this world has kept all these from them. They insist on clinging to the selfish desires which poses a barrier between us and our teachableness. The truly spiritual man therefore exercises himself to put all these barriers away and makes himself teachable.

Sir Henry Taylor (1800-1886) said, "The correspondences of wisdom and goodness are manifold; and that they will accompany each other is to be inferred, not only because men's wisdom makes them good, but because their goodness makes them wise." This is so true. I've witnessed extremely high levels of stupidity in people and when this is observed, you can always be sure that people who do these things are godless and immoral people. People who have the intention of stealing, embezzlement of public funds, and other ulterior motives, you find them reasoning like idiots. I have seen people who were very rational and objective in their thoughts on particular issues, but when they had the opportunity to cheat and make dishonest gains from the same issues on which they had reasoned rationally, they start sounding as stupid as those they had once criticised for stupidity and dishonest gains while they didn't have the opportunity to make the dishonest gains. So even a wise man is made stupid by his wicked intentions.

I once listened to one of the Corps Marshal of the Federal Road Safety Corps in Nigeria give a speech. He didn't rise up through the ranks of the corps to head it and he was relatively young compared to many of his subordinates while he headed the corps. After his speech one of the young people asked him how he managed to work with people who were older and more experienced than him in the corps. Of the many things he said, he pointed out that to succeed in such an agency you need to be conscious of the fact that many of your subordinates know better than you. He said that civil servants are extremely intelligent and that the only time they start acting foolish is when they are trying to achieve an ulterior motive. So godlessness turns the naturally intelligent person into an idiotic creature.

The righteous man pays attention to his ways and strives for rightness of method and action, fairness in dealings, accuracy in speech (that is to mean what he says, say only what he means, and ensures by his speech that what he means is well understood as what he says and no further), and so on, and by this means he is naturally exercised in both knowledge, right methods, good communication and discipline. The godless on the other hand is more keen on cutting corners, dealing falsely, and as wisdom will always dictate what is contrary to his object it will be his daily practice to shun wisdom. So they're exercised in all the intricacies of idiocy and stupidity. Having seen a lot of dishonest people, the only thing they possess that has a semblance of wisdom and understanding is sentiments. And this they possess because it aids their corrupt endeavour and makes people more susceptible to their wicked devices. As obedience to God makes us wise and knowledgeable about God, so does goodness give us understanding and wisdom about the things of the world. Goodness makes men wise. Well said Sir Henry Taylor.

The spiritual man therefore is keen on making himself teachable so as to receive tutorship from God himself. This he does by ensuring that he pursues obedience to God for he shall not tutor the disobedient and irreverent. To be teachable is to be outrightly obedient to Jesus as a result of loving him above all things else, that is why he said "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (John 14:21). And he went on to say, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23). He will manifest himself to those who love him and who keep his commandments and abide with them. It is not a gamble. It is a sure bargain. Love me and I will manifest myself to you and abide with you, love me not and you'll have none of me. Love me, and you'll keep my commandments, love me not and you won't. Simple.

Obedience grants us acceptance with God. It is written in Acts 10:35, "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." So we see that it takes obedience to be accepted by God. Whatever salvation we have from God must both flow from the point of obedience and lead us to more obedience for us to be accepted of him.

Psalm 140:13 says, "Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence." The whole essence of this book is the residing manifest presence. Everything a man does to enjoy the presence of God without obedience is futile. I know some people who obviously live in disobedience and give fictional stories of their enjoying the presence of God, you just know they are telling stories for their disobedience

testifies against them that they are liars.

It is written, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." (1 Peter 1:22). To obey the truth is to purify the soul.

It is written, "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word." (Psalm 119:99 - 101). To keep the commandments of God is to gain access to uncommon wisdom and understanding.

And finally, "And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." (John 12:50). The commandments of God is life everlasting. The keeping of it is the attainment of that life everlasting.

Final Note

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."
(Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Not everyone who comes to Christ is admitted into his friendship. He's choosy and would reject very many of those who come to him. His friendship means we must accept him as Lord. This requires keeping his commandments in totality.

One important thing to note is that friendship with Jesus comes at a cost. A.W. Tozer said in a sermon, to accept Jesus as Lord is to accept his friends as your friends and his enemies as your enemies. You know one of the things this means? It means you'd have very few friends and very many enemies. It means you'd feel very alone at times.

Sometimes I wonder, why do people hate Jesus so much? It amazes me. Imagine you had a son who you spy from the window frantically fleeing home and panting as he's being chased by angry people. If it were few boys of his age, you'd assume he must have said something bad, played a nasty prank, or stepped on someone's toe and refused to apologise. Or something you'd be able to understand and explain quite well. But what would come to mind if you found the whole town chasing him? What would you think if among those chasing him you find a policeman, a judge, a soldier, and people across all spheres of life chasing him angrily? You'd be amazed trying in vain to imagine what exactly he must have done. The same way I think of Christ when I consider the multitude of the enemies he has. Sometimes I tend to ask him when I consider the level of hatred men (both past and present) have towards him, "what did you do? Why do they hate you so much?" The Bible tells us he has done all things well (Mark 7:37), however the Devil who is called the prince of this world has turned the hearts of these multitudes against Christ for no reason blinding their hearts so much that they can't stop to reason that a man who has done all things couldn't be deserving of such a hatred they have for him.

Friendship with Jesus means we accept these multitude of angry foes as ours while also accepting to have only the few friends of his. The closest to you at times may be nowhere near your

neighbourhood. Obedience to Christ would steadily make you become enemies of the men and women of this world. Even amongst those who call themselves by his name, you'd still find many enemies who don't submit to his Lordship. Why this could make you feel very alone, you can be sure that you'd never be lonely. Jesus is worth the whole world, a thousand times over. Such is the sweetness of his friendship.

Believe me, life wouldn't be so fun without enemies and it is funner when they are so many and you have Jesus, the best of friends, on your side. Having so many foes to vanquish makes life epic. And having foes who you could just shut out of your world and snub on account of their irrelevance because you have the bestestest of friends makes living glorious. It has been my habit to always sleep in a mosquito net and it is with much relish I always watch mosquitoes buzzing round my net trying to reach me. It is with pleasure I watch them knowing that they are trying in vain. Watching a world of foes buzzing around who can do us no harm in life and in death except for our benefit is far more pleasurable. Friendship with Jesus is indeed the most blessed of all callings.

Let's round off with this hymn:

"Who would know sin, let him repair
To Calvary: there shall he see
A man so pained, that all his hair,
His skin, His garments bloody be!
Sin is that rack, which forces pain
To hunt its food through every vein."

---From George Herbert, in Hymns and Sacred Poems, by Charles Wesley, 1739, page 27.

Let us shun sin which our Lord hates and for which thing he was also nailed on the cross of Calvary, and obey him in all things. This is the only way we can be his friends. May God help us to be friends with his Son in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we have brought this chapter of ultimate importance to a close, may this mark of love be seen on all our actions. The mark of obedience to your good and perfect will. Help us to love you and so obey you according to your own dictates now and for all our days. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 17: PURITY

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."
(Matthew 5:8)

We come now again to purity. We had talked about purity briefly and had said that we shall talk more about it later. So let's talk about it to a fuller extent.

While many may assume that obedience and purity are the same, they are not. It is true that they are closely related, are always complementary, and are ever in absolute agreement, but they're different all the same. While obedience refers to actions, purity refers to a state. The state of being pure. A dog is obedient but not necessarily pure, but water (that is a drinkable one) is of necessity pure though not obedient. The actions of the dog makes it obedient but the state of the water makes it pure. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8). So when Christ speaks of purity here, he means something different from obedience. To see God and experience his manifest presence, this state of purity is essential and must therefore be carefully maintained. This purity is essentially the purity of heart which of necessity results in purity of thoughts, motives, conducts, and appearance. Without this no one shall see God.

There are a lot of things that seem similar and interwoven and when perceived as one and the same thing they lose their meaning, and this is detrimental to the judgment of the Christian

man. For example I once heard a sermon of A.W. Tozer where he elaborated on what it means to be holy and his explanation that holiness is different from obedience. He said it entails obedience but when God says be holy, it transcends obedience to mean, like purity, possessing a quality in one's personality that one can perceive something otherworldly about you. Not in what can be pointed out such as a distinct clothe, or a distinct shoe, but having that something that men see in you. As we shall see in more detail later, like purity, holiness is an end result of dwelling and walking with God, and the very process of walking with God is itself a purifying process.

Referring to our text in Matthew 5:8, Jerome refers to such pure people as those "whom no consciousness of sin reprove." And went on to say, “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. The pure man is seen by his purity of heart, the temple of God cannot be defiled." So, purity is a state in which a person finds himself of which a conscience of sin does not reprove. The only way the conscience of sin will not reprove a man is if he is obedient to God. And herein is how obedience and purity are closely related and in total agreement. In the knowledge of God's commands and will, lack of obedience can't bring about purity. The action of obedience makes a man pure as the action of purifying water makes it pure, but disobedience defiles a man as the action of trampling on a stream makes it muddy and impure.

We have said much earlier that there's not a place where God is not, meaning in essence that we are always in his presence in a way. All men, both good and wicked, are in his presence. What makes the difference is whether or not we see him. This sight of the Holy that makes all the difference can only come by means of purity.

The tragic comedy of the present day church is to see a people who downplay the importance of purity express wishes of experiencing God's presence. Of course the expected happens. They assume all manner of foolish things that happen in their midsts are a manifestation of God's presence. Sometimes you see foolishly staged miracles and so called demonstrations of power. You'd see a woman in a mini skirt, painted face like Jezebel, fake nails looking like that of eagles, speaking to people who claim they're experiencing God's presence and his power. Some blab away and call that speaking in tongues.

One I witnessed in my church some time ago was when the pastor, who I assumed had arranged and practiced with some specific members of the church to act as though some little things he did made them "fall under the anointing." He called one of the ladies out and blew at her with his mouth. The plan was that she was to fall but she didn't seem to have the courage to fall. Quite embarrassingly she found something funny and was about to start laughing. But she turned the laughter to make it seem as though she was laughing at the Devil or something. But people would be there, suffering from the starvation of the manifestation of God's presence, accept that as a sign.

I went to the house of a friend, and while I waited, I watched their television and saw a prominent preacher in Nigeria leading one of the biggest so-called churches going around in his congregation and his members were falling about on the floor as he approached them. Then he came close to one woman who was supposed to fall, but it seemed she had her eyes tightly shut and was carried away so she did not fall. What happened to others didn't happen to this one. The pastor gave an uneasy and embarrassed glance at the camera, then poked the woman slightly with a pen or something and she suddenly started

jerking, having been poked, and fell to the ground. I was dumbfounded when I saw this.

Of course I hope you realise that this is all comedy and no spirituality, right? When you see all these shows of madness and queer stupidity, it is not the manifestation of God's power and presence. It is what it is, madness and queer stupidity. When you see the members of these so-called churches where amateurish arts of deception are practiced, their members are so worldly, the sermons stupid, and their songs and appearance near satanic. There's no trace of purity, yet they claim to be experiencing the mighty power of God. But do not be deceived by all these.

The real presence of God can come from nothing short of purity of heart. The psalmist plainly tells us, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." (Psalm 24:3 - 4). Let no foul preaching pastor of a depraved congregation deceive you that he sees God.

The Problem Of Sin

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."
(Luke 5:8)

The antithesis of purity is sinfulness, and sin it is that defiles a man. Sinfulness is to disobedience what purity is to obedience.

Sin pulls a man away from God. From the beginning of creation we see that sin pulls a man away from his God as Adam and Eve hid themselves from God. Not that God even judges him and casts him away, he himself flees and casts himself away.

Like a contract must be with the consent of two parties to be valid or be annulled, sin ensures that the separation from God is complete. Both parties are involved in the dissolution of the union. On the one part the sinner cries, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man," (Luke 5:8) and on the other part the holy Lord says, "depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:23). So sin makes a perfect separation from God and both parties go their separate ways. Therefore, he that must fellowship with God must eschew sin and pursue a life of purity.

The Call To Purity

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded."
(James 4:8)

"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good."
(Romans 12:9)

We have a call to purity and the call is so clear that we can't ignore it. The verse above invites us to come to God and tells us in the second part of what it is to purify our hearts. Cleansing of the hands refers to deeds and purifying of the heart refers to purity in motives and thoughts.

1 John 3:3 says, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The purity of Christ is a call for us to be pure because we bear his name, and if we are to be true to that name we must be like him in all ways. If we are not pure, we are but liars to call ourselves Christians. If we, despite not being pure, think we are Christians, we are but self deceived. If we present ourselves to the world as Christians while being impure, we are but deceivers and abusers of his holy name. But if we answer that name with a true and clean conscience, we must of necessity purify ourselves even as he is pure. Anything contrary to this is a misuse and an abuse of that most holy name.

It is written, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). The peculiar people of Christ are a purified people. And that is what makes them peculiar. The call to be a Christian is a call to purity in every form. Purity of heart, thought, motives, conduct, and appearance too.

How Purity Is Attained

"And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."
(Acts 15:9)

The first and foremost thing we must realise is that God is the purifier. That is what the verse above informs us of. The hearts

of the Gentiles in question (as well as that of all of us is purified by God). So it is the work of God. But we must work to this effect too. It is written, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." (Psalm 127:1). The builder has his part and the Lord has his part by prospering that work. Though we know that God is the purifier, not to work on our purification is like a builder refusing to build a house because the Lord says except he builds a house the labourers labour in vain..

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “If God wished not that man should be without sin, He would not have sent His Son without sin, to heal men of their sins.” Purity comes by God healing men of their sins. Rutherford also used this expression, “He would not put His seal on blank paper...” Not to work on our purification is like expecting Christ to put his seal on blank paper. Throughout the scriptures, especially in the records of the kings, we read of God being pleased with one king because he prepared his heart to seek the Lord, and being displeased with others because they didn't prepare their hearts to seek the Lord. So, we must have it at the back of our minds that we have a role to play, but all we do is in vain except he effects the purity in us.

It is written, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Proverbs 20:9). Purity of heart is not an inherent part of our nature. It is not something that we can fold our hands and expect would happen all by itself. Also, it is not something that is a one off event. It is a progress and so the work is continuous. There is no end to this work of preparing and purifying our hearts. As said, the very walk with God is a purifying process. And so as we continue to walk with him we

undergo purification.

The major way by which God purifies us is by his word. It thoroughly reforms and refines us. The Lord says, "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). This tells us the word of God reforms and refines us like fire in a furnace. His word is also like a hammer that breaks in pieces. When we come to the word of God it breaks us in pieces and so God can remould us into what he wants. That is why the hymnodist wrote, "break me, mould me, and use me." Reformation comes after the breaking. The process of refining, reforming, and remoulding is not a pleasant one. It is a painful process that if we subject ourselves to it would refine us thoroughly and we shall become such fine Christians.

The man that must be purified must sit beneath the hammer of God and in the flames of his fire. The hammer of the word would painfully take away your cherished pride, vanity, self righteousness, wrong opinions, and everything you cherish. As a matter of fact you will be dethroned from the throne of the self. You will realise that you're but a man, dust and ashes, and no god. These are painful things to lose. It may not seem so at reading it but it is so in truth. The mere acceptance of the fact that you're wrong, whether in deed or by utterance, is awfully hard to stomach. I have experienced this myself and in my conversation with others I've realised that it is so with all. When someone does something bad that he thought was right, when you bring it to his notice and explain why it is wrong he wants to change the topic immediately. If the conversation ought to have continued, probably to explain what ought to have been done the next time, he becomes impatient and wants to move on to something else. It is awfully hard for people to accept or

dwell upon the fact that they were wrong. Why? Because they are seated upon their fictitious throne of excellence, and to realise that one is wrong is to make a painful realisation and accept that one is wrong is to get off that throne and sit in dust and ashes where one belongs.. And this is just about the least of things the Bible would do to you. In coming to the Bible many such realisations would be made.

The religious leaders of the Jews crucified Christ because he threw them off their lofty thrones. They couldn't stand Christ pointing to the people that they were wrong. The fact that he told them that they were wrong was what led them to kill him. The religious leaders themselves had their own factions and they were bitter against each other and each strove to prove that their faction was the right faction. At the time when Jesus displayed his sagacious wisdom on the issue of paying tribute to Caesar, the Sadducees came to him with their best argument and with what they supposed was an indisputable evidence of a true life example. They came with all these things with the hope of getting the endorsement of Christ, but Christ rather proved to them that their argument was erroneous for he said to them, "And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?... He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err (Mark 12:24, 27). Thus proving their error and reproving them for it, he silenced them. It is then written, "But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together." (Matthew 22:34). Why were they gathered to him? Because he had put their adversaries to silence and proved that they were right. They put aside their previous animosity and were gathered to him.

We also see this when Paul stood trial before the chief captain that saved him from the mob that would have killed him. It is written, "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle." (Acts 23:6 - 10). Those who came all the way from Jerusalem to seek how Paul may be handed over to them so they can kill him suddenly became his staunch defenders, saying they find no evil in him. Right there and then they declared that what if a spirit or an angel had spoken to him and that in opposing Paul they were fighting against God. Just imagine. They made friends and made enemies based on who proved they were right and who didn't. Oh how sweet that fictitious lofty throne of rightness is sweet to man and hard it is to get off from.

As we see this in the Pharisees, if we examine ourselves and study man well enough we can see that we all have this trait in different degrees. Because to ourselves we are little gods and to affirm that we are right is but to be worshiped. When we come to Christ and sit beneath the hammer of his words we shall be tipped off that throne, broken, and then shall we be moulded

into fine Christians.

We had talked about honesty in seeking God. The reason why many people are dishonest and dodgy in seeking God is because they are trying to dodge the hammer of God and the fire of his word, and the effect is obvious. They aren't broken by his hammer and so can't be remoulded and reformed. They aren't heated by his fire and so can't be refined. So we have many pitifully deformed Christians in this age.

Next, we are purified by faith. Back to Acts 15:9, it tells us that God purified their hearts by faith. So it is by faith that God purifies the heart of men. And we are told that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Here we see again the importance of the word. The reading of the word produces faith which in turn purifies the heart.

Next purity comes by obedience. It is written, "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." (1 Timothy 1:5). In essence the purpose of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, etc. Obedience results in charity that is born of a pure heart. Every act therefore of obeying God is an act of purifying ourselves. Everything we have discussed about walking with God purifies. The very process of walking with God is a purifying process. And every act of disobedience defiles the heart. And every act we do to enable us obey God is an act of purifying ourselves. For example, to stop moving with bad friends who keep dragging us to sin will have the effect of purifying us. To stop watching movies because of how they suggest carnal things which are enmity with God is a way by which we purify ourselves. Abstinence and departure from the things of the world purifies us.

So those are briefly the ways by which purity is to be attained.

Promises To The Pure

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."
(Matthew 5:8)

There are innumerable promises to the pure. And it is mostly that it grants us access to God and draws us closer to him. The biggest of these promises was uttered by no other than our Lord himself, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8).

It is written, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." (Isaiah 33:15 - 16). All these are the ways of the poor. The promise here is both security of life, property, and sustenance.

It is written, "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend." (Proverbs 22:11). God is that King. The pure in heart has God for a friend.

This follows that we have union with God by purity. It is written, "... he loveth him that followeth after righteousness." (Proverbs 15:9). There is a form of love God desires from us.

While it is not a love which entails lust and sensuality, we would be in the path of the truth to say that the love God desires to have with us is like the love between a man and a woman. There are several expressions in the Bible that bring me to this conclusion. Many Christian writers believe that the book of the Songs of Solomon was written as an expression of the love between God and his people as I too have also used some of its text in this book to explain how we ought to relate with God in love.

Samuel Rutherford was fond of making such expressions, that is, of presenting the love between Christ and himself, and the love between Christ and the church, like a love between a man and a woman. He once wrote, “God be thanked that my Bridegroom tireth not of wooing. Honour to Him! He is a wilful suitor of my soul.” It gives us more clarity of the chastity and warmness that exist in the love of Christ for his own. Like the love between a man and a woman, the delightfulness of the union with God is one we can literally feel. This union can be brought about by purity. And purity, in a fallen world filled with temptations, can only be brought about by abstinence. It is written, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8). When we, by abstinence, attain to purity of life we shall see God and be united with him.

God's love for those who go after a life of purity can be seen all through scripture. As we have said before, purity entails purity of actions, purity of conversation, purity of thoughts, and purity of motives. It is written in Isaiah 33:15-17, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence

shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off." When we live a life of purity as narrated in these verses, it says we shall see the king in his beauty. This king is God and the land that is very far off is heaven. If we can live lives of purity we shall become so conscious of God's presence and heaven that even the earth shall begin to seem like a dream and heaven a present reality. As we go from day to day engaged in life's activities, we shall go through them as one dreaming, but all around us shall be the glory of God radiating. His presence and his glory shall be intensely felt.

The promises in scriptures are endless. So what do we do seeing we have these ample promises? It is written, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7:1). Let us purify ourselves and live a life of purity. May God help us in this noble pursuit. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Father, help us to be pure as you are pure. Bring us to that blessed state that is void of defilement. And by this may we see you and find ourselves engulfed in the aura of your glory. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 18:
A GOOD CONSCIENCE

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."
(1 Timothy 1:5)

Next thing to look at in regards to our walk with God is a good conscience. This is closely tied to purity. Remember what Jerome says? He says that the pure are those "whom no consciousness of sin reprove." In other words the pure are those whose conscience are right with God. So what is this conscience and what role does it have in our walk with God?

I won't delve too deep into the subject of conscience here because I had written about it in an earlier published book of mine titled, "UNITY IN PURITY" in the chapter, "HANDLING CONTROVERSY." I also later wrote more on the conscience in my book "PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST." In the last chapter of the second section you'd see it titled, "TAKING HEED TO THE VOICE OF THE CONSCIENCE." There I wrote in detail about conscience. I refer you to those books. They are free. You can glance through them before proceeding. Here however, I just wish to point out how it is of cardinal importance to our walk with God.

It is written in 1 Timothy 1:19, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." Without this good conscience we shall make a

shipwreck. And that then would mean our walk with God is unsuccessful, and our destination is eternal damnation.

As the Bible is often careful to qualify the conscience with the term "good conscience," it implies that there ought to be a bad conscience. A good conscience is that which lives on the word of God. A Christian therefore must ensure that his conscience is not hinged upon the opinions of men or any other thing. It must be founded on God's word else it is no good conscience. Samuel Rutherford wrote, "I beseech you in the bowels of our Lord Jesus, keep a good conscience, as I trust you do. You live not upon men's opinion."

Many are led captive by a gullible conscience and are exploited by their captors. Today many, because of a gullible conscience, think they are robbing God if they don't give a tenth of their money to the coated men who call themselves pastors. They don't consider carefully if ever the Lord collected such money, or if ever his disciples collected such money or ever preached such extortive doctrines. But because their conscience are gullible, not being founded on the word of God, they are exploited.

But we must be cautious here. The subject of the conscience is a tricky subject to handle. Even the gullible conscience must not be violated by the Christian man, else he's a sinner. Though the Bible is the ultimate and final authority to the Christian man, the conscience too holds power and is of high authority, second only to the authority of the Bible. It doesn't matter whether it is a good or faulty conscience. It is a representative of God appointed of him in the hearts of all men. To despise it is to despise God who implanted it in man. Though the conscience may be ignorant and ill informed, yet must it be highly regarded.

Romans 14:17 tells us of eating with a defiled conscience. At one part it says, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17). Meaning that there's nothing wrong with any food you choose to eat, however the chapter concludes with these words, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23). So he that goes against his conscience, because he's not sure of the rightness of his actions, and goes ahead to eat what his conscience tells him not to eat, is damned. This though there's nothing wrong with eating in itself. It's like a messenger that may occasionally bring you wrong instruction from its superior [the Bible], but because of the authority vested upon it, even the wrong instructions it brings must be strictly adhered to.

If we must walk successfully with God, we must build and maintain a good and firm conscience before God being fully built upon his word. Nothing can satisfy the conscience and let it grow more than the Bible. And having done this we must not trade it for anything.

There are many things and circumstances in life that will demand that we sell our conscience but we must hold it firmly and never let it go. That is the world shall continue to offer us what seems like benefits in exchange for our conscience. For example, a young person being unprepared for an exam may be tempted to cheat. The benefit is to pass the exam. But the consequence is to give up your good conscience.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, “To give out conscience, and get in clay again, is a strange bargain!” Very strange for whatever the benefit that comes with giving up the conscience is never worth

the testimony of a good conscience. He said again "Imagine what pain and torture is a guilty conscience; what slavery to carry the devil's dishonest loads." Everything compared to a good conscience is but clay. What you get in return is but pain and torture placed upon you by the Devil. This is nothing but slavery to the Devil. Never undervalue your conscience. Never over value the vain things of this world. Never give up the conscience for the cheap satisfactions or purported benefits all around. They're not worth your conscience. Without this conscience you'd shipwreck your faith and earn damnation.

It is true that when we violate our conscience we come under a load of guilt. But are there not those who do evil without even feeling it in the slightest degree? Yes there are. So have these ones escaped the Devil's slavery? No! They're rather lost and the Devil needn't bother himself anymore. For there is a good conscience, a lively conscience, a defiled conscience, and a seared conscience. The good and lively conscience is that which can feel the burden of guilt when violated. But the defiled and seared conscience can't. Now the benefit is that the lively conscience leads to repentance which saves the soul, but the defiled and seared conscience keeps one in his sins. If the lively conscience is ignored by its owner, rather than repenting, it would soon die and become seared.

The lively conscience does not die a violent death. No screaming, no commotion, nothing. It just lies down gently and dies. I once read that there were a people in a particular part of Africa who have this sort of special ability. When they're pissed at something they'd say they can't take it and that they'd die. And saying that they'd lie down and die. I don't know how true that is, but the conscience does die like that. So gently and quietly that even the owner wouldn't be able to tell that it is

dead.

My mum (or dad, can't really remember which) once told a story of what happened in their village. Some children were playing outside and having fun when an elderly man met them and asked them about their mum at noon time. They said she was sleeping. The man knew it was absurd and not common for the woman to be sleeping at such a time of the day. He immediately knew she was dead. He went into the house and confirmed it that she was dead. Their mother was dead but the poor children were playing outside thinking she was merely sleeping. That is how the conscience dies. No one would least suspect that it has died. Life would still go on, the soft groans of its pains being drowned in the hustle and bustle of activities, and the meaningless sounds of excuses for sins. When neglected it will lie there gently, completely dead, while life is going on as usual.

I have just spoken briefly here on the conscience. I strongly recommend reading the chapter on conscience in my book, "PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST" and "UNITY IN PURITY" before proceeding. But let us be rest assured here that without a good and lively conscience, we shall shipwreck our faith.

A good conscience is health to the soul. À Kempis Thomas said, “Many words satisfy not the soul, but a good life refresheth the mind, and a pure conscience giveth great confidence towards God.” The only thing that can satisfy the soul is a good and pure conscience.

Let's conclude with a verse from a hymn by Jane E. Leeson, in "Hymns and Scenes of Childhood, or a Sponsor’s Gift" (1842):

"Love in loving finds employ,
In obedience all her joy;
Ever new that joy will be,
Loving Him who first loved me."

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to have a conscience free from all defilement and deadness. Give us a good and lively conscience that will make our walk with you sweet and lovely. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 19: PIETY

"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there."
(Acts 22:12)

Now we come to piety. What is piety? Piety is simply religious reverence towards God. Such reverence also entails religious fervour. It is being devout, that is being committed to God. Piety is so important to our faith that I could as well say a man is either a pious Christian or no Christian at all.

Richard Baxter wrote, "If all religion were a deceit, it were fit to be banished, and atheism professed, and men confess themselves to be but brutes. But if there be a God, there must be a religion; and if we must be religious, we must sure be so in seriousness, and not in hypocrisy and jest. It being no such small, contemptible matter, to be turned into dissembling compliment." Being seriously religious is piety. Practicing one's religion in levity is impiety. We cannot maintain a steady walk with God in levity. And by the argument of Richard Baxter, it means that upon the fact that there is a God, upon the fact that our most holy faith is true, the only right and reasonable response to that is to be pious. Where God is God and our faith is true, impiety is but outright foolishness.

Piety is a sense of faithfulness and commitment to God. To be religiously devoted to his will and injunctions as revealed in the

Holy Writ. Piety is essential for a healthy church for all the rancour and disorder we find in the church are brought by impious people or impious acts. If everyone took the matters of faith and every word of scriptures seriously and were faithfully devoted to understanding and obeying it, we would be naturally united into one. But the impious ones in our midst won't let it happen.

Piety is essential to enjoying our walk with God. And of course if you want to go the whole way in something you must derive a sense of joy in doing that thing. This does not necessarily mean something has to be fun (I'm quite averse to seeking fun as a motivating factor for doing anything), but joy can come from different ways including satisfaction. When you derive a sense of satisfaction from doing something you'd be filled with joy for doing it. Only in piety can we enjoy to the full our walk with God.

In the book "Way-Marks; or, Directions to Persons Commencing a Religious Life.", it is written:

"A half way christian can neither enjoy the pleasures of the world nor the pleasures of religion; for his conscience will not let him seek the one, and he is too indolent to obtain the other."

In a way then, we might as well say that it is better to be fully un-Christian than to be a halfway Christian, that is a Christian who holds his faith with levity. A Christian who holds the truth of the Christian faith but does not live by it. He knows all liars would go to hell for example, yet he seems not to be able to put off lying. Therefore, unlike the nonChristian he lives in the fear of damnation and loses his peace. And not living in this fear he

enjoys all the sinful pleasures with joy that can't disturbed by terrors of a lively conscience. To be no Christian is better than to be an impious Christian. And in agreement to our line of thought, it is written, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19).

If indeed we have chosen to be Christians, we have no choice than to choose the path of piety in our walk with God. To choose to be a Christian at all and still not choose to be zealous and pious is foolishness. Any choice apart from being a pious Christian is no less than self torment and/or self deception. Why not just banish the thought of God and embrace the world with its madness? Do you think that those who have no thought for God or his ways don't enjoy themselves in the life they've chosen? They do of course, and that is one of the reasons they don't give religion a thought, for religion threatens that enjoyment. But wisdom is to both forsake the foolish ways of the world and choose the right ways of God, and having chosen it, to follow it with all seriousness and piety and so enjoy God's presence where there is fullness of joy and pleasures at his right hand. God himself will not walk with those who take his words with levity. God loves the pious man.

It is worthy of note that we need to be careful to avoid being fanatics in the bid to be pious. Fanaticism is even opposed to piety. For piety leads man to seek the will of God which is in all goodness and to follow the path which reason dictates, but fanaticism on the other hand leads a man in the path of excessiveness. Though it may sometimes seem to be in the will of God, we all know that the will of God is that our deeds should be done in moderation (Philippians 4:5) and not in excessiveness or extremism.

Also, it is the error of many to see God as the extreme God. All through scriptures we don't see God being described with extreme qualities. God is called good, holy, kind, merciful, upright, and so on, but I can't remember if ever he was described with extreme qualities. Perfection in goodness entails perfection in a right balance of things, not extremes on the right or on the left. God is a God of moderation, not of extremes.

Some holding the view of a God of extremes say Christ is not God because God is extremely holy and can't live in our sinful world. God is too exalted he cannot eat human food. God is too clean; he cannot use a human toilet. Nature can't even call him to use the toilet. They go on and on in their foolish rant and say if Christ were a man who, being man, of necessity did these things and even suffered and died, it means that he is not God. But such foolish notions that portrays an Almighty incapacitated by his own extremes is more fitting for the theatre of comedy and not for religion. Indeed it is blasphemous impiety to say God is limited by his very own powers.

Rather God is perfect in goodness. Like an archer that hits the bulls eye is perfect. He's perfect not in the extremes of aiming extremely high or extremely low, extremely to the right or extremely to the left. His perfection is in the balance in all the four directions mentioned and hitting the mark. God is lofty yet lowly, majestic yet humble, merciful yet severe, kind yet he disciplines. He wouldn't let his mercy stand in the way of his justice, neither would he let his majesty prevent his meekness. His very nature is a nature of balance, and therein is the perfection of his goodness found. Not in extremes of any quality.

Furthermore, extreme views don't reflect piety or even wisdom, rather it reflects not just foolishness but an impairment in

reasoning. When you lack the ability to think aright and have a balanced view of things, then you begin to hold extreme views. Just as when swinging a stone tied to a rope, provided the rope of rationality remains intact the stone keeps moving in circles (an orderly motion) around the centre of reason, but when that rope snaps, not being able to hold to the centre of reason, it moves off the centre in a wild tangent of extremes. Usually how the minds of extremists work is that they look at something perceived as evil and, not possessing the right judgment by which they define good and follow it or being too lazy to do so, start doing the opposite and believe that the more extreme they are doing the opposite the better they are. But the ability to define the path that is good, the width of it, the direction of it, the course of it, and to develop the will to follow it require great understanding and painstaking considerations which the fanatic lacks. So let not the man who holds extreme views of anything consider himself pious or wise, or that he were holier than those with less extreme views. Rather, he is showing his inability to think rightly and balancedly.

Some people, wanting to be extremely pious, look at the world and see how they play with people of the opposite sex, get married and think it is wrong to be romantic. Their faces are as firm as a flint when with their wives. Why, you wonder. It is people of the world that play with the opposite sex, so to do the entire opposite of it, we shouldn't even play with our spouses. But as I explained in my book, "INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME," being romantic is a Christian virtue Christian spouses ought to possess. A good life therefore should never be lived in extremes but in the balance revealed in scriptures.

So excessiveness is contrary to God's will, his wisdom, and his

nature. This is whether or not the things in which one exercises excessiveness in were perceived to be the will of God. And excessiveness cannot fail to make a man wicked either in deeds or in judgment. So, let us not foolishly allow ourselves to slip into fanaticism thinking we are trying to be pious.

I have found in my study of the word of God and of life in general that right judgment and living a good life is all about striking the right balance of things. Anytime a desire to move in the excess of one thing pops up in your head the scriptures will rebuke you, and when you move to the excess of the other it will rebuke you again. The same it is with life. It rebukes you when you go to the excess of one and still rebukes when you go to the excess of the opposite direction. One particular thing that easily comes to mind is ease and work. Take too much rest and the Bible would rebuke you as a sluggard. Ah, I mustn't be a sluggard right? Then let me exert myself to excess of work, and then you will be breaking the law of Sabbath which though the letters of its laws aren't binding on us, yet our lives must be guided by the spirit of the law which is rest. And of the same Bible you will hear, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep." (Psalm 127:2). If you sleep too much and have too much ease, life will rebuke you with poverty and want as it is written, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, And thy want as an armed man." (Proverbs 6:9-11). Work too hard and life will rebuke you with sicknesses and bad health. Be a slack parent and you'll spoil the child, beat them beyond what is meet and you'd be a wicked parent. Is it right to talk or is it better to keep silent? Is it right to save or is it right to spend? Is it right to eat or is it right to fast? Right

actions can't be determined as with one hard and fast rule that can tolerate extremes. What is right in today's circumstances may be wrong in tomorrow's circumstances. What is right in Mr. A's home may be wrong in Mr. B's home. Therefore the Bible tells us that there's a time and season for everything under the sun. And so wisdom teaches us to weigh each action, balancing things up in reference to time, season, circumstances, expediency and much more. And oh how beautiful life is to require such judgment from us as mortals to be lived rightly. So a good and wise man by a balanced judgment is able to be both firm and magnanimous, he's able to save and also spend, to speak and also to be silent. For in possessing both and in knowing the time to do each he makes it manifest that he's a rational being controlled by the faculty of a rational mind, and to do otherwise is to show a defect in character as when a man who can't save is called a spendthrift for he lacks self control, and the man who can't spend is called a miser. A man who talks always is called a talkative lacking the control to be silent. And a man who can't talk is called dumb or a coward lacking the ability to speak up when speaking is required. All these speak of defects and not strength of character and judgment. And if we can attain to some level of good judgment in the balance of things, shall we then suppose that the perfect God shall be wanting in judgment so as to possess extreme qualities rather than possessing perfection of balance?

Indeed we have in the holy Son of God a balanced quality of being both the lion and the lamb. The predator and the prey. The eternal judge and the condemned. He is all in all. He is no extremist. He is perfectly good.

A pious man therefore is one who studies the word of God to understand it in all simplicity, and once there is an

understanding of his will for him, he follows it in simplicity and seriousness, according to his dictates. And in his seriousness does not stop short of his dictates and in right judgment does not go further. So, a successful walk with God cannot be without a deep sense of devotion and piety towards God and his ways. May God help us to be absolute Christians and not partial Christians in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Oh Lord my God, help me to be a pious Christian. Remove from me all levity. Help me to be devoted to you in all faithfulness and seriousness. Save me from the ways of fanaticism and lead me in paths of reason and goodness. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 20: SOBERNESS

"... be sober..."
(1 Thessalonians 5:8)

Now I wish to write about something I wrote about in my book on Christian dressing and in an article on my blog titled, "JEST, SATIRE, HUMOUR, LAUGHTER, AND SOBERNESS." Here however, I'll treat soberness with special emphasis on how it is of benefit to our walk with God.

Soberness, contrary to what the stigmatisation of the word has made many believe, is a major Christian characteristic. I pointed out in my book on Christian dressing that people within the Christian circle have this stigma for the word soberness and being sober. They prefer people to be all happy and jumpy and excited and almost give a moral attribute to these behaviours. But the opposite should be the nature of a Christian person. First because we have so much reference to soberness and direct commands to be sober in the Bible. Apart from these, there are many other reasons why a Christian person ought to be sober. And so soberness must not be downplayed. As a matter of fact it is essential for a successful walk with God. And without it we may make a shipwreck of our faith.

In all the groups to which Paul spoke about in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, one thing was common. Whether he spoke about bishops, deacons, their wives, older men, younger men,

older women, and younger women, he commands that all should be sober. If therefore this one word is repeated for everyone, we can then know that it is a very important trait of a Christian person, and for this reason, it is indispensable for our walk with God.

So let's explore this important characteristic together. We will start with the things that can be considered to be opposite of soberness and delve fully into what it means to be sober.

Laughter

"Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."
(Ecclesiastes 7:3)

"When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them."
(Psalm 126:1 - 2)

The first thing we'd look at that is considered an opposite of soberness is laughter. First we must remove from our mind that soberness is a state of dejection and gloom. And while it does have a connotation of seriousness, it does not mean that one lacks the sense of humour or that he hates laughter, rather it means knowing when to laugh and when not to laugh. The Bible says, there is a time to laugh and a time to weep (Ecclesiastes 3:4). The difference between a sober man and a frivolous man is

one knows when to laugh and the other can laugh at everything including his own calamity.

Laughter is not bad, but to live one's life in search of laughter is folly. We must beware of the fact that excessive laughter works against soberness. Even in the most serious conversation a little laughter wouldn't do much harm, but to leave the serious issues on ground to turn the whole conversation to be in a way that stirs laughter is unwise. Paul made a little joke when he said, "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" (1 Corinthians 12:17). The thought of having a whole human as an ear is quite funny. It may not be funny to some, but it sure is funny to me. But he doesn't dwell on all the weird things a man can appear as, assuming it were funny to him also. He went on in the serious conversation of the importance of the unity of the church.

Laughter is an expression of happiness. It takes a killjoy not to laugh in happy moments, not a sober person. The Bible says"When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them." (Psalm 126:1 - 2). The mouths of these righteous men and women were filled with laughter when God released them from their captivity. The laughter, the singing, the deliverance, and other things were the things that made the heathen know and say that God had done great things for them. But though it is good, we should therefore avoid making laughter the sole aim of anything we do.

Other things that are similar to laughter are jesting, humour, satire, etc. These all have their uses and are good in their place.

Jesting for example is good in family times with one's spouse and children. Satire for example is good even in serious conversation when there's a need to bring out the stupidity or absurdity of an argument. So they all have their place and a sober person makes good use of them all. And that said, we shall now proceed to look at soberness.

Soberness As It Pertains To Seriousness

"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience."
(Titus 2:1 - 2)

"For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."
(Ecclesiastes 1:18)

Soberness is principally seriousness. Sometimes the word grave is used alongside with being sober. So being grave and being sober are alike. Both mean to be serious. Not merely looking serious or trying to be serious but being serious as a person. There is a great difference between being serious and looking or trying to be serious. If a man asks his children to read (which of course requires seriousness) and in his absence they begin to crack jokes, but the moment they hear a sign of him coming they suddenly stop the laughter and jokes to become serious in study. In such a state they're serious in truth because they do have a reason to be serious and serious they are because if they fail to be serious they'll probably get a good thrashing. However, that is

not the seriousness we are talking of here. It is being serious as a person, not merely in looks or outward action. This also entails having a focused and purposeful outlook on life.

This does not mean, as we have said, that the sober man lacks the sense of humour, rather it means the sober man is thoughtful in character. A sober man is reserved and thoughtful, not sad and gloomy. So soberness is not an opposite of happiness, joyfulness, or humorousness. In fact they can be complementary. Soberness therefore is the natural comportment of a studious and contemplative person and a Christian ought to be a studious and contemplative person. Our faith demands that we study first the Bible, Christian books and literature and other good things of benefit. We have a command to study. It is written, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15). This implies first that we study the Bible. Though it uses the word "study" in a general way, that it concludes with the words, "rightly dividing the word of truth," means that the command to study pertains primarily to the word of truth (The Holy Bible) and whatsoever would help us to rightly divide the word of truth which includes all forms of good literature and academic books, for they too help us understand and rightly divide the word of truth. When we read of the holy fathers, we can see them use mathematics, astronomy, physiology, and other sciences to rightly divide the word of truth. And again it is written, "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." (1 Thessalonians 4:11). This is now pertaining to business and everything that shall enable us run a successful business.

In the light of these things we can see that the list of things

which the Christian ought to study are endless, therefore the Christian man ought to ever be in the study of the things pertaining to his faith and those things pertaining to his business. He shall therefore be in a lifelong pursuit of knowledge by means of study. The need for much study would mean that he would need moments of quietness everyday, for who will argue that a man needs quietness to study.

It is written, "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things." (Proverbs 15:28). "The heart of the righteous studieth..." This now refers not to the study of text but the study of things, events, causes, effects, and actions, which things are done by contemplations. The righteous man is contemplative and this takes his endeavour of study even further for while study of text requires a place and time of study, contemplation can happen everywhere and all the time we are awake. If therefore the need to study a text requires a time of quietness, then the need for contemplation requires that quietness all the time. Quietness all the time is rarely possible, but the righteous man seeks to be in a state of quietness to make him contemplate as much as possible.

Quietness is essential to a studious life because noise drains energy and thinking, study, and comprehension also burns energy. I'm not sure these things have been scientifically proven but I've had at least two instances in my life that revealed to me that they are true. The first was when we moved from Pakistan where my father had served as a diplomat back to our country Nigeria. In Pakistan we had been used to services of quiet and solemn hymns (or to put it in our present context, we sang sober hymns), but when we came back to Nigeria it was noisy and rhythmic music they sang in church. It was our practice not to eat to church, which was mostly to save time so that we don't

go late, but I rarely felt hungry during church service all the while we were in Pakistan. But when we returned and we went to church, the moment the music started intense hunger struck me like lightning. That was the first time I remember I had the experience of noise zapping my energy. The second time was when I was in university. For some reason I didn't eat before going for the exams. I couldn't concentrate or comprehend anything I was reading except there was a pin drop silence. And I mean a pin drop silence. Even if someone were to open the door of the exam hall I won't be able to even read what was before me, not to mention comprehend it. That experience made me make up my mind that never will I go for an exam again without eating at all cost. I realised that I needed energy to comprehend and, since I was lacking in energy because I didn't eat before coming for the exams, each noise in the venue zapped the little energy I had. From these experiences I realised that thinking, study, and comprehension as well as noise burn energy. Noise takes from whatever energy you have to think, study, and comprehend. So noise would compete for whatever energy you have to be used in the productiveness of study and contemplation.

Is it any wonder why we see people who enjoy being in noisy places often lacking judgment. Some of them would just get up one day and go and pierce their ears, others would start frying their hairs, and putting on all manner of stupid looks. No time for silent retirement to consider the rightness of a choice before making them, no time of silent repose to examine oneself and pit one's ways against all standards of reason, morals, ethics, and expediency as revealed in scriptures, good books, sermons, etc. No time of quiet reflection to be truly human. It is enough to just run around the place, make a little money, feed the stomach, and waste the rest of one's life. A wise man, though he

may not always have the luxury of silence, will always ensure he has an extended period of silent retirement each day.

Apart from quietness aiding every act of study, a sober comportment itself aids clarity of thought. The calm repose of a sober man helps him to think better and more productively. And the boisterous and noisy fellow cannot think clearly and often has poor judgment. A man who would therefore be of sound judgment must be a man who must have ample times of retreat.

Cultivating a mind to be sober entails much study. Have you found yourself unable to read or have you seen someone with this type of mind that can't concentrate to read? That is an unsober mind. He may not be drunk but he's unsober still, due to some influence other than strong drink. So drunkards and every type of unsober person do have something in common. A sober mind is open to grasp new information and process it adequately. A mind that isn't sober wonders often to the length and breath of the world and is thus unfit for most profitable engagement. The more study you engage in the more sober you become. The talkative and the man of society would lack sound judgment. The sad thing about those possessing bad judgment is that they lack the judgment to know they lack judgment. For this reason it won't be obvious to them.

Seeing these things it is easy to realise that a truly righteous man is by nature sober. The man who would be faithful to his calling would naturally be a sober person even if it were not commanded. His studiousness would forge him into a sober man with a sober comportment. His looks would not have the effect like what people expect from the erroneous view of soberness, an effect that cast a deadly shadow over reality. Rather his looks would inspire awe and respect, and his face would shine. As it is

written, "... a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed." (Ecclesiastes 8:1). Not only this, virtue also shall be written all over him.

Back to the issue of laughter, it is worthy of note that the serious and studious man detects humour in things far more than the frivolous man. And this makes the sober man to enjoy the humours of life more than the frivolous man. Those who are generally opposed to the idea of soberness are often fun seekers who think soberness is anti-fun, but little did they know that even the art of fun needs to be studied soberly if life is to be truly fun.

That's just on the lighter side, but it shows that there's no reason whatsoever not to be sober. There's no reason whatsoever to be frivolous and fun seeking. A man's usefulness is greatly increased when he chooses the life of soberness. Not just to look sober but to be sober. To be truly sober a man needs to be forged in the heat of the furnace of study, studiousness, thoughtfulness, and contemplation.

Soberness As It Pertains To Being Sane And Rational

"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."
(Acts 26:25)

We've already seen to a great extent how soberness makes a person rational and how rationality makes sober. That is in

talking about it meaning being serious, but let's just point it out more specifically now.

When the apostle was called mad by Festus the governor, his response was that he spoke the words of truth and soberness. This informs us that words of truth and soberness are opposite to the words of a mad man. Since our focus is on soberness we shall focus on soberness being the opposite of madness. Truth being the opposite of madness would be another day's topic. I believe the sense in which Festus used the word "mad" on the apostle was crazy or insane. The word grave and being sober are alike and in agreement to what we have been saying they both mean; being reasonable.

Being sober also means being in a state of mind of which one is able to think clearly, stably and factually. Not in a state where one is unstable to think clearly either by strong drink, strong emotions or disquietude (such as overwhelming grief as in a case where one is bereaved), anguish of soul and body, etc. And to add to this list, our mind can also be made unstable by ignorance. The sober man therefore is both rational and logical.

The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:13, "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause." To be by ourselves means to be overwhelmed with grief. Here the apostle Paul presented two opposites. One of being overwhelmed with grief and the other was to be sober. To the apostle, the opposite of being overwhelmed with worry, anxiety etc. is being sober. While the things mentioned here are negative emotions, there are also positive emotions which also are opposite to being sober. One that comes to my mind easily is excitement, particularly baseless excitement. Excitement for excitement's sake. Being overwhelmed with any form of emotion

is contrary to being sober. Being under the influence of some emotion is contrary to being rational, for you can scarcely be emotional in your reasoning and rational simultaneously. Being sober therefore is being in the right frame of mind and it is in soberness we can reach the peak of our intellectual capacity required for a good and useful life towards God and humanity.

This also rubs off on how church music ought to be styled. I once read on Facebook that an experiment was done on rats and they discovered that when rats are in their sound minds they enjoy classic orchestral music, but when they're high on weed they enjoy reggae. As we have said that strong drink is not the only thing that makes a man un-sober. Grief, strong emotions, etc. also makes people un-sober. Certain emotions also make people high and unsober.

The kind of music we enjoy says a lot about our state of mind whether sober or mad, happy or sad, it tells a lot. I too have experienced that the music I enjoy tells me a lot about my state of mind so my proof is beyond a rat experiment. There is a music called "Flower Duet" or "Lakme," can't say the exact name, but if you search for "Flower Duet" or "Lakme" you'll see the piece. When I'm happy and everything is going as I desire, this music is beautiful to my ears and soul, but when everything is sad, dreary, and unpalatable, the sound of it jars on my ears. Just as the state of mind has a great influence on how we enjoy music, so does music also influence and shape our minds. That is why there is music for different things. You have military music that when artfully rendered inspires, at the same time, a combination of calm, resolve, courage, and combat readiness. There are music for comedy, action, romance, meditation, etc. The style of church music therefore must be a form of music that inspires and instills soberness for all the reasons discussed in

this chapter. I won't go further talking on church music here as I am already in the process of commencing work on a book devoted to Christian singing traditions. Watch out for that.

Soberness As It Pertains To Humility

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."
(Romans 12:3)

Soberness also implies humility. For as study and studiousness makes a man sober, so does humility. Humility inspires soberness and the things that forges a man into being sober would naturally make him humble too. The clarity of thought that soberness affords would make a man realise his humble state, and wisdom inspired by the same soberness would make him accept it and thus become humble.

The man that is sober, not merely in looks but in truth, is a studious man, and study opens one's perspective to the great and lofty. And a man having his eyes on the great and lofty would make him realise his own lowliness. Who would have gone through the works of a wise king Solomon, our beloved apostles, an Aurelius Augustine, a Hilary of Poitiers, an Athanesius of Alexandria, a Lord Francis Bacon, a Richard Baxter, the great works and achievements of Cyril and Methodius, and the likes, the great achievements of great kings and generals, people rising from obscurity to turn the world, and in the light of all these be

puffed up in his own petty achievements, that is if there be any? And so the man of great knowledge is a humble man. The proud man on the other hand is ignorant and has a distorted view of things.

King Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, after a long life of exhibiting the best of wisdom lamented saying, "I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me." (Ecclesiastes 7:23), yet an ignorant fellow that probably knows only his alphabet would think he is all wise and all knowing. And so the same Solomon mocked saying, "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." (Proverbs 26:16). So that is the way of fools, but a sober man with deep understanding and clarity of thought is a humble man.

Humility also works like bitter medicine for pride is a bitter thing to swallow. Not only is it bitter, it is a hard thing to swallow. I've seen a number of funny memes about pride. One I saw was of a poppet frog sitting down as though in sad contemplation, and they wrote, "I want to swallow my pride but I don't have soup." Another was of a fat man with a fat neck, and they wrote, "I have swallowed my pride, come and patronise me." Seeing his fat neck, it seemed to me that he tried to swallow his pride but it got stuck in his throat. All manner of things show that indeed pride is a hard and bitter thing to swallow. So humility works like bitter medicine on the character of man. In the bitter swallowing of pride it purifies his inward man, and in the hard swallowing of pride he exercises his intellect to choose the right and reasonable over the ruinous and pleasurable.

If a man can, in humility, choose the right and reasonable over the ruinous and pleasurable, such right judgment shall be seen in

all other choices of life, whether it is in his Christian walk, business, family, or otherwise. He shall always choose the right and reasonable over the ruinous and pleasurable, and what a fine man this would shape him into.

So when the beloved apostle wrote, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Romans 12:3), it becomes obvious that he used the word soberly as an opposite of thinking of one's self more highly than he ought, which thing is both pride and vanity. Soberness therefore is the opposite of pride and vanity, and so it is synonymous with humility.

As we have seen, soberness works humility and humility works soberness. So the call to be sober is a call that among other things implies humility too.

Soberness As It Pertains To Being Watchful And Alert

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."
(1 Peter 5:8)

Being sober also implies being alert and watchful. Have you ever seen soldiers partying, giving in to emotions, laughing, and other things that are antithetical to soberness when they're behind the enemy lines? I guess not. At such a time they must be alert and

watchful. So while soberness may not directly imply being watchful or alert, watchfulness and alertness must be in soberness.

There are a lot of things the Christian needs to be watchful and alert for. Alertness is required in all aspects of life because, as our text says, the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may destroy. Seeing he's the devil we watch against we know his malice is great, and seeing he's like a roaring lion we know his destructive power is great, and seeing that he walks around seeking whom he may devour we know that no aspect of life would be spared from his attacks. So we need to be watchful in our inward life, private Christian life, family life, in the affairs of the church, and the society as a whole. The Devil would work all he can in all these aspects of life and more. So we must be alert in all of them, yes including about the society which some Christians erroneously think they shouldn't get involved in as much as possible.

Our dear Lord and Saviour said, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." (Mark 13:33). Seeing our Lord and master commands us to watch, it would be foolish to choose any form of life other than a sober life, for he that is not sober cannot fail to be negligent.

I spoke more about being watchful in my book, "PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST." It's also free.

Some Benefits Of Soberness To Holiness

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly..."
(Titus 2:11 - 12)

A good Christian life relies largely on this one trait. I do not see how a person can be a fine Christian without soberness. Our verse above says the grace of God teaches us, amongst other things, that we should live soberly. This grace we are told brings us salvation. So let's look at some benefits of this great thing that the grace of God teaches us.

The conscience is deadened in the absence of soberness. In the noise and boisterousness of frivolities is the voice of conscience deadened. But in the silence and retreat of soberness and a sober life, the voice of the conscience, though still and small, is heard loud and clear. Since a voice is all that the conscience has, it begins to fail when its voice is ignored. A man that is not sober cannot have a lively conscience, and once this happens, all the evils that come with not having a good conscience shall come upon him. A rational man understands the dimensions of sin. The length, the breadth, the width, the depth, as well as the great folly of it. Whereas the frivolous toys with a thing that is so great so much that it'll sink a whole world of sinners in hell.

By extension, in the society at large, when frivolousness and noisiness becomes the order of the day, we shall realise that immorality begins to thrive because we aren't sober. When the society is fashioned in a way that the consciences of people are drowned in a clamorous and noisy setting, there shall be little or

nothing that shall caution them from evil. Immorality thrives when people aren't sober enough to give a proper reason for each and every of their actions. When their conscience can't speak to them and they can't settle down to reason with their conscience they'll move like a ship without a captain destined for the rocks. And since we are all players in the destiny of our societies, the life of each individual shall be dashed for lack of soberness, so shall our societies be dashed when those who constitute it imbibe a life that is not sober.

I hear a lot of moralising calls and moralising campaigns in the society, from radios, from the tv, in events, etc., but all the outward calls to drive men away from evil must have an inward reception in the conscience and contemplative and sober mind to be effective. No one shall give an adequately right response to any call towards good if the call is discarded by the noise of activities and noisy life even before it gets to the conscience. And this will then have an effect on the corporate conscience of the people. Evil practices (sometimes given holy names) will then thrive and sink the society into confusion.

For this reason, having church gatherings where sober hymns and spiritual songs aren't the only mode of singing works against the purpose of our gatherings. We gather to learn, to be edified, to talk to our conscience and enliven it, but we also engage in riotous music and dancing. Things that in no way reflect a sober mind. To gather for edification and instruction and also engage in riotous music and dancing is engaging too contrary things that work against each other which is a foolish thing to do. It is just like tying a stone to a sling. Let as many as do this repent of this unhelpful practice and let as many as would be sober depart from assemblies given to riotous worship services.

Mirth does not belong to the church and does not work for our purpose of gathering. Rather it works against it. It is written, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." (Ecclesiastes 7:4). While mourning itself cannot be given a moral value, the soberness and soul searching that characterises it on a normal day is of immense moral value, this in turn attracts the wise. Mirth on the other hand, while it can't also be called a vice, is one thing that attracts fools. While our music must not be music of mourning, as though we are mourning for a dead Lord and not rejoicing for a risen one, we must ensure that they are qualified by soberness and contemplativeness which things mirth is so injurious to.

In the madness of mirth and mirth loving people in Nigeria there is a song sung in church that goes with the words in pidgin English, "No be say I day craze, na God I day praise o," which means, "it's not that I'm mad, it's God I'm praising." This song is self condemning because whatever action you make that can be mistaken for madness so much that such explanations were required is already akin to madness. And if similar to madness in character, then what else is it than actual madness. And even if it were a mere semblance of madness, the Bible says we should avoid the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:20). So then why should our mode of worship have a semblance of madness? And seeing the song is self condemning, to drag God into it as though he had prescribed a mad way of praising him to us, it becomes blasphemous. This is the level of actual madness mirth can drag us into. Here I make another call to repentance. If the Lord tarries and prolongs my days and grants me grace, I shall write a full book on our Christian singing traditions to remind us of how far we've left the mark and hopefully cause us to repent. But let this suffice for now.

Soberness, which we can liken to stopping to think, is the basis of right actions. The lack of soberness that we witness in our world today is the cause of the abundance of foolishness we are witnessing. People doing things without any reason or practical benefit. Sometimes it is just minor things of doing things without a purpose. Things so useless as putting on a glass frame without lenses. And at other times we witness more serious issues that tend to madness and moral depravity. Things like putting on of earrings, frying the hair, tattoos, sagging the pants, embarrassing people of the opposite sex, cross dressing, and fixing of artificial things which is a form of mental disorder. A mental disorder called body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). But women who do this won't know for they aren't told the truth. Rather all the force of the media is used to promote mental disorders in women to exploit them financially. Just as once upon a time people who were homosexuals were treated as people with a major mental disorder but are today accepted in some parts of the world as right thinking people, that is how today body dysmorphic disorder is no more seen as a mental disorder. People suffering from this disorder are even your celebrities and models you'd see on billboards and magazines. But let the whole world sink in mental disorders, the Christian must in soberness keep his head.

But why would a thing as bad and disgraceful as a mental disorder trend so far and wide across the globe? Because not being sober, or not being allowed to be sober, people won't stop to think. And so madness, bad actions, foolishness, moral depravity, and a whole world of evil reigns supreme in the affairs of men just because they won't stop to think. Such things prevail where soberness doesn't exist, but where soberness exists they are checked.

It is written, "Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that

is a companion of riotous men shameth his father." (Proverbs 28:7). A riotous people can't fail to be both foolish and destructive. Even to keep company with them is foolishness, not to talk of being a riotous person yourself. When you're given to partying, noisy activities, jamboree, and relish in them, you would be a shame to your father. That is of course without intending to be one.

Lack of soberness is the Devil's hemp for man by which he shuts out reason and makes men reason like idiots. When we begin to give excuses for such things that are done without a reason the Devil has a lot of windows to sneak his contrabands into our midsts as the body of Christ. Take for example when someone wears a mini skirt, there's no reason for that except that the wearer would say it's none of your business. When a person is found spending an unnecessarily long time with a person of the opposite sex, there's no reason for that too. But while it may even be innocently done, it leads to sin when done without the intent of marriage. These and much more the Devil has successfully sneaked into the church. People do this because not being sober, they are not careful to give a logical base to each of their actions before doing them. They don't think through. They are content to act like brutes. But if everyone would be sober, think through, and ensure that they have a logical basis for each and every one of their actions, morality would be the order of the day. A person won't be company with the people of the opposite sex because, thinking soberly, would conclude that if the intent of marriage isn't there, company with a person of the same sex is more productive. Furthermore, it will keep him from sin. A person would refuse to wear a mini skirt if thinking soberly she is able to reason that the purpose of putting on clothes is to cover ones nakedness, and if what is to be done ought to be rightly and properly done, it would amount to

dementia to be naked in part. So you see how soberness would improve, promote, and establish morality in the earth?

There was a time in my church that a girl stood to sing in the choir with a very revealing dress and an elder went to her to tell her not to sing in the choir with such a dress but she refused. It ended in a scuffle with other young men in which I heard that the clothes of the elder were torn. It was a sad thing to happen but it shows to what extent the Devil has sneaked his contrabands into our midsts. Now the stance of the church was that you can't dress in revealing clothes to sing in the choir, but what happens to those who don't sing in the choir? Is it okay to come to church in revealing clothes? That is the case because had that girl not attempted to sing in the choir nothing would have been said to her if she were in the congregation. The church is now entrenched in bad and irrational practices that Jezebels have occupied the church. Just so you know, the people who fought with the elder were suspended from fellowship but also restored after few weeks.

They saw people dressing half naked, and they really thought it were possible to be in one's right senses and dress this way. So bad was their reasoning that people given to such a life occupied the church. But the idiocy became evident when they fought with an elder before the whole church and tore his clothes. Rather than purging the church of such idiocy, they didn't do it because it is bad for "kingdom business."

The level of evil in which both church and state can be sunk into by the Devil's hemp is without limit, but when each and every person rejects his hemp and is sober and would not do anything except he is able first to define the reason for that action and explain to himself why it is for the best good that he

does it, then the Devil has no more room whatsoever to sneak his goods into our midsts.

We can therefore see that the lack of soberness advances sin and works against holiness. Soberness on the other hand checks all the advances of sin. The more time we spend in sober and contemplative study and meditation about our ways, the more prone to holiness we shall become.

Sundry Reasons To Be Sober

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."
(1 Peter 4:7)

On a final note, let's discuss some sundry reasons to be sober. We have seen the benefits of being sober and how it is indispensable. In the light of this we have to remind ourselves that life is no joke. Let the men of the world joke with life but the Christian knows that the stakes in life are extremely high. The matters of heaven and hell are not things to trifle with. For this reason, we must be sober. The apostle Peter presents the fact that we ought to live with the end in view to admonish us to be sober. He says, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." (1 Peter 4:7). So the end of all things which shall determine whether or not we make it to heaven or we are damned in hell is at hand, and in the light of this, the only rational response to this is soberness.

Another reason to be sober is the knowledge of our exceeding

sinfulness and the inveteracy of the same. In the knowledge of this the right response to this is contrition as we shall see later. The man who is full of laughter and frivolous in his outlook on life is, as we have said, an ignorant person. Among the host of things he is ignorant of is his own sinfulness and the inveteracy of it. If he knew that then what would justify his laughter? It is written, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." (James 4:8 - 10).

Conclusion

"But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation."
(1 Thessalonians 5:8)

So, there's no reason why a Christian should choose not to be sober. As we have seen the different contexts in which the Bible uses the word "sober" we can see that none uses it to mean gloomy, sad, or dejected. For this reason we must revive this trait amongst Christians if we are to experience more and more of God. As it is important to revive the trait amongst Christians it is equally important to both revive the true meaning of the word and preserve it. The reason why it is important to revive the right meaning of the word and preserve it is that we have no other word for this stalwart quality of a Christian person. If

this very important word lose its meaning, there will be nothing to define the right comportment of a Christian. If it is wrongly seen as being sad and gloomy, it will mean that either Christian people unconsciously grow into dejected people trying to follow scriptures word for word or have to snub the instruction to be sober to avoid being gloomy. And if they ignore it, the importance of possessing all the good traits defined by this one word would be lost. Christianity will continue to be a religion of hippie-like people. People with no bearing in anything. Not even in their faith. It is one miracle word that can cure a lot of personality defects and diseases people possess. To lose the meaning of the word would be a tragedy. So we must by all means preserve the trait and the right meaning of the word. And having maintained it and preserved it, we must impress it upon ourselves.

The Christian fold today downplays the role of soberness to our faith but it was always emphasised upon by the apostles. We too ought to emphasise this and not encourage worship, songs, or lifestyle based on excitement or mere uncontrolled emotions. May we become a studious, reserved, rational, well comported, and serious people in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord, your word admonishes us all to be sober, both bishops, their wives, older men, older women, younger men, and younger women. Teach us to be all sober in humility, in rationality, in studiousness, in seriousness, in watchfulness, in alertness, holiness, and in godliness. Remove from us the distorted notion we have of soberness that we may learn to shun the Devil's hemp. This we ask in your dear name. Amen.

CHAPTER 21: FOLLOWING PEACE WITH ALL MEN

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."
(1 John 4:20 - 21)

Next thing to talk about that is important for a successful walk with God is to be at peace with men. This may not seem important but it is very important. And seeing it is easily downplayed when considering the things that are important in our walk with God, we must be careful and cautious never to allow ourselves forget the importance of it. We must consciously make the effort to be at peace with all men, both believing and unbelieving, else we shall wreck our walk with God.

The spheres of life in which we are to live in peace can be broadly divided into three. The home, the church, and with all men in general.

1. Peace In The Home: It is written, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." (Colossians 3:18 - 21). In this Colossians 3, we find a list of commands teaching us on how to relate with each other in the home. All these inform us on the best way to be at peace in the home. It speaks to the wives, then to the husbands, to children, then to fathers. If all members of the home play their roles as commanded here the home shall be peaceful. I spoke on the roles of each member in detail in my book, "THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME." I recommend it to you. The full ebook is absolutely free.

2. Peace With The Brotherhood: It is written "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God..." (1 Peter 2:17). The whole of the New Testament, from the Gospels to the book of Revelation, teaches us about having peace amidst ourselves as a church. So this can't be over emphasised. "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." (1 Thessalonians 4:9).

3. Peace With All Men: It is written, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14). Lastly, we must follow peace with all men. By all men the Bible means both believing and unbelieving. Without this peace with ALL men, we shall not see the Lord. It is true that when we maintain that the Bible is true and all opposing views are false, people would call us bigots. To hold that the Bible is true and opposing views are false is the only wise and logical view to hold. So whether people call us bigots for that, that is their problem. They know little of what they are talking about. However, we must avoid being bigots in the true sense of the word.

What does it mean that we should avoid being bigoted? It

means we should never have this feeling of superiority over people of other faiths, knowing that we are saved by grace and not by works. By the merit of Christ and not by our intellectual prowess. So we are not superior to those of other religions. Though we are right and they're wrong, we yet come to this knowledge by the grace of God alone.

Not being bigoted also means we are not intolerant. So we should be religiously tolerant. This must be understood in the right way. I wrote a detailed article about this titled "ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY" which can be found on my blog. Please make reference to it on what I mean by being religiously tolerant. But it doesn't in any way mean we should accept the views of other religions.

These are the three broad groups we can divide people into with whom we should have peace. The way we pursue peace with each group of people differs from the other. We must therefore ask for wisdom, patience, and tolerance to be able to live in peace with everyone.

I have, by experience, seen that the way we relate with others has a way of leaking into the way we relate with God. If we treat others with contempt, somehow you'd be more prone to subconsciously treat God and the things of God with contempt. If we are easily angered by the actions of others and respond angrily, we'd find ourselves easily angry at the things we perceive to be the workings of God when we feel they are against us or don't approve of our ways. These things confirm to us that we can not claim to love God when we hate our brothers (1 John 4:20 - 21). If while a person hates his fellow men he thinks he loves God, the Bible calls him a liar. And all liars would have their place in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8), not

in heaven with God. It is also written, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." (James 3:17 - 18). So our relationship with others is almost as important as our relationship with God. For it is usually a mirror of our relationship with God.

Also, we need to be cautious about the value we place on others and our relationship with them. When we see ourselves placing little value on other people, or yearning to be in a state where we don't have need of others, and I see it very common with those who perceive themselves as spiritual, it is a sign of a deep seated problem founded on pride, not spirituality. We are going out of the way God ordained things to be. We all need each other and God has never made a man anything without the help of other men. Even David, his beloved, had need of men to strengthen his hands.

I know people who often like to behave as though men are irrelevant and God alone is who they care about, and take their actions to be spiritual and suppose the Bible is in support of such behaviour, as it is written, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help." (Psalm 146:3). So it seems like men are not relevant. But there is a difference between trusting in men and regarding them. And there's a pride of feeling self-sufficient behind one feeling he doesn't have the need of others. So this is not spirituality at all.

I remember a time when I was putting up a quote on my Facebook account. I wanted to use a quote by John Wooden (1910-2010) which goes, "Talent is God given. Be humble. Fame

is man-given. Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful." I removed the part that goes, "Fame is man-given. Be grateful," because I didn't feel that I had need of others and that God alone was I to be grateful to, but now I'm older and wiser. I now know that the man in his entire quote was absolutely correct. I didn't correct it on my Facebook account because I want it to remind me of my error, not to keep my error in mind, but just to remind myself that I'm wiser now.

We need to be grateful to men. There are things that can only come to you through men and if they don't give it to you you can't have it. Not because God can't give them to you directly but because he won't. Rather he'd move men to give it to you, so we must recognise that it was given to you by men, and while pride draws us back from showing gratitude, we must be grateful to men for the good we get from them. God is the bountiful giver of all blessings, yet we must appreciate the instruments by which these blessings come to us.

I know the level of badness we can experience from men. Yes it can be unthinkable. We experience betrayals, ingratitude, disloyalty, and so on from even the closest of family, friends, and loved ones on whom we've put so much trust and for whom we've done so much. Many times in the course of life we may find that the only constant friend in life is Christ. The natural response to this is to disregard men as absolutely unreliable. Such a conclusion is well deserved but may not be so right. The psalmist wrote, "I said in my haste, All men are liars." (Psalm 116:11). Such a conclusion that roundly declares men to be all liars, all profane, or all unreliable, is a hasty judgment. We must be careful how we trust and be wary of men, but we must be patient with them too. The fickleness of man should not make us lose sight of the immense good that comes to us from God

through them. The right disposition to have towards men is to be wary yet grateful to them as instruments of manifold goodness from God.

Also, when we like to place little value on others and wish to believe we are self-sufficient, it shows us that our reliance on God would probably be because we are in need and do look to him for the granting of that need. The moment a person who relishes self sufficiency has enough for his needs, the same feeling that made him discard others would now move him to discard God. Just like in his prosperity the psalmist feeling self sufficient said, "And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." (Psalm 30:6). At that time he felt self sufficient, then what happened? It is written in the next verse, "... thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." (Psalm 30:7). So in this aspect also our disposition towards men also reflects our probable disposition towards God, so we must watch against these things in our lives.

To prove to us how important our relationship with others is, Christ says, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." (Matthew 5:23 - 24). He didn't ask the person to quickly offer his sacrifices then hurry to go make peace, but he ought to leave the gift to be reconciled with his fellow man first. This speaks volume. To be at peace with our fellow men is more important to God than our sacrifices to him. And today, while we don't offer sacrifices at altars like in the Old Testament, we offer sacrifices every moment. Our very life is a sacrifice to him. While we strive to live a life pleasing to him, we must know that we must be very committed to ensuring that we live at

peace with all men and that our ways should be void of offence to them. Let us not be over spiritual to be only bothered about the things of God and despise men.

As it is written, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14). Though it is not certain, yet we may safely assume that the Bible means that without peace with ALL men, we shall not see the Lord, seeing the following "peace with all men" is mentioned alongside holiness. It is easy to know that the special emphasis here is holiness, but I suppose without both we can't see the Lord. Now, we must remember all that we have been treating since the beginning of this book about seeking God, finding him, and walking with him, we must know that without this one act of following peace with all men, all our endeavour to seek God may be futile. Let's not run the risk. Let's follow peace with all men.

Elsewhere it is written, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you." (1 Thessalonians 3:12). We're called to abound in love first to ourselves, then also to all men. ALL MEN! When these verses say ALL men, they mean people of other religions too. There are some who feel we should treat people of other religions as enemies. We shouldn't eat with them and we should keep our distance from them, but this is far from the biblical stance. So we must be cautious that we walk peacefully with people of other religions despite their opposing views to our religion.

On this basis, one thing we must be careful to do when dealing with people of other religions is to avoid blaspheming their religions (Acts 19:37). Two reasons why I say this is because it

was not the way of life of the apostles. It was said of the apostles, "For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess." (Acts 19:37). While they taught against the worship of gods which are no gods (something that is simple logic) they never blasphemed the gods of other people. Of course their preaching of the truth provoked many acting under the influence of Satan, their actions were not such as should provoke people on a normal day. We read of them preaching to people and how many gladly heard and received them on account of their teachings, they were glad at their teachings and utterances, not provoked. Then what was different with those which were provoked for their good action of preaching the gospel of good news? Nothing, just that they chose of themselves to be provoked. So the apostles did a good deed of preaching zealously without blaspheming the gods of people.

It is also written, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (Colossians 4:5 - 6). As we walk with those who are without, we must work with wisdom and our speech must be such as have a soothing effect. When it says our speech must be with grace and seasoned with salt, it means our words must be sweet and pleasant to the ear as opposed to being harsh and unfriendly. Reiterating the importance of wisdom in dealing with those who don't belong to us when it says, "... that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." Understanding is needed on how we converse with people to ensure that our words have a soothing effect on the hearers.

Not even our leaders should be allowed to lead if they don't have a good report from unbelievers. And how shall they have a

good report if their utterances and ways are maliciously injurious? It is written, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach... Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:1, 2, 7). So the issue of living at peace with those who are without is no small issue.

Furthermore, in a surprising way of speaking, the Lord Jesus said, "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." (Luke 16:9). This may seem to be talking about money but who are the "they" who shall receive those that fail into everlasting habitations? I don't pretend to understand this verse at all and it is to me about the strangest verse of the Bible. This seems to go against everything the rest of the Bible says. The rest of the Bible says there is heaven and hell. Those who succeed go to heaven and those who fail go to hell. But what is this "everlasting habitations" spoken of here for those who fail? Is there a pagan paradise? Maybe not as blissful as heaven but free from the torments of hell? It is extremely strange to me and I can't just imagine in what way or time I may come to understand this verse. But if Christ says "they may receive you," he is referring to people. And those people are most likely those without for he says "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness..." How does Christ command us to make friends with unrighteousness? I don't know. But I believe this emphasises the importance of relating well with those that are without.

One thing people often fail to realise is that the Bible gives a direct command against reviling other people's gods, as it is written, "Thou shalt not revile the gods..." (Exodus 22:28). This was commanded to the Israelites who were supposed to burn them, refuse to worship them, etc., but they were not to revile them nonetheless.

During Obama's presidency in the US there were some people (which I guessed professed to be Christians) who said they wanted to come together to openly burn the religious textbook of another religion to show how much they denounced it. They must have taken a cue from what happened in apostle Paul's time that people openly burned their books of magic arts (Acts 19:19). But that was not Paul, Peter, and Silas burning people's religious textbooks before their eyes in an obvious act of provocation, this was rather those people choosing of themselves to show that they openly denounced their past ways. So there is a clear difference.

Open acts of provocation are not good. Even God does not like it. Holy men of the past didn't do it. It was not the manner of life of the apostles to do so. The testimony about the apostles in Acts 19:37 was not a false one for none could witness that the statement that they had not blasphemed the gods of the heathen was not true, but after this speech was given, all the people addressed were simply dismissed, meaning they were in agreement with that statement. People did read the meaning of blasphemy to the gospel they preached but it was not blasphemy.

It is written concerning Pharaoh and Moses, "And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land. And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we

shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?" (Exodus 8:25 - 26). Moses chose not to sacrifice in Egypt because of the fear of provoking the Egyptians. For this reason, we must also be careful not to do our religious acts, whether individually or collectively, in ways that would be seen by the unbelievers. For this reason I advise those who like their church's sound system to be blasting all through the streets to desist from it. It doesn't have to be so silent as to impede the hearing of those within the church, so it is not bad if to make people within the church hear what's being said properly that people within close proximity to the church hear the sound of the things going on within the church. But it is wrong to do the sound system to deliberately sound loud to the hearing of those outside the church. This is very common in Nigeria. And it is not even the sound of great things like doctrinally and intellectually sound sermons, but just chaotic beating of drums, playing of musical instruments, and shouts of people. In fact today the Christian fold in Nigeria has been characterised by noise. When you hear a type of noise you know it's a church. I hope this stops in no distant time.

In speaking evil of other people's religion we aren't doing God any service. Some take it to be an act of uncommon boldness to speak openly and derogatorily against the beliefs of others. It is not. However we mustn't show them any reverence either nor think in any high regard about them. We are not called to support nor to stand against them. We are only called to witness to the truth. All the commands we have about people "without," that is unbelievers, are of peace and not of provocation. It is written, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." (Colossians 4:5). And again it is written,

"That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing." (1 Thessalonians 4:12). So we must be careful in the ways we deal with unbelievers.

A.B. Simpson wrote, "A sanctified body is known, as physical health is known, by the appearance of the tongue. Your physician asks to see your tongue when he calls, and there is no surer test of a sanctified body than the condition of its tongue." So our tongues must be used to make peace. Where we begin to use our tongues for provocations, it shows that we are unsanctified. We must repent of it and turn to God for cleansing.

If in the course of witnessing to the truth something may be seen as derogatory, one needn't bother much. For example some people get offended when you say Jesus is the Son of God. They become provoked and are ready to fight or even kill. For such don't bother whether or not they're offended. They're offended in themselves not because your words are derogatory. For the work of God must not be hindered by sentiments and faulty judgments. We don't owe people any form of overdue regard that we shall then live in fear about how to please God. So, in matters of contrary views and doctrines, or in letting unbelievers know their damnable state, we must be bold, even if this is considered offensive by them. What is important is our motive. Let it be that we only seek to witness to the truth, not to provoke people.

So we are not called to be at variance with unbelievers. Not even on account of their disbelief and other things that may result from their disbelief and error. We are even to avoid immoral people who are called brethren than unbelievers even though they may be depraved. It is written concerning unbelievers, "If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast,

and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake." (1 Corinthians 10:27). But concerning the immoral "believer" it is written, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." (1 Corinthians 5:11). So we can see that we are given licence to eat with unbelievers but not with the believer who is immoral. A good Christian should relate well and be on good terms with the unbelievers. In general, we must maintain a cordial relationship with people of other religions and not be intolerant towards them provided it does not impede our obedience to God and the execution of our civic and moral duties.

This requires wisdom and understanding. We need to be able to balance between living in peace with unbelievers and the service and obedience to God. For God commanded the Israelites that they should not blaspheme the gods, as we have seen, yet God asked them to burn their groves, etc. (Deuteronomy 7:5). We must therefore know the difference between blaspheming the gods and burning their image, that is in respect to the Israelites. This burning was not to be an act of provocation, but an act of obliteration lest it become a snare. We too, in this dispensation, ought to know the difference between being at peace with all men and watching against being snared by their practices, doctrines, and undue closeness to unbelievers.

There are many ways undue closeness to unbelievers can become a snare to Christians but one that easily comes to mind is that our children and little ones run the risk of being led astray by their heresies. As a child, as I said before, I and my family lived in Pakistan for a considerable amount of years. As you probably

know Pakistan is a state Islamic country and is called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. This saw me living closely and schooling with Muslims. Christians were so few. Most times if there were a Christian in a class he'd be the only one in his class. So I was snared by this exposure as a child. As I began to hear the teachings of Islam and how the stories they teach were so similar to what we have in the Bible, and differ only in things like Abraham being called Ibrahim, Jacob being Yakubu, and so on. The characters were identical and the stories were almost perfectly the same. This made me think Christianity and Islam were one and the same thing. A Muslim friend of mine told me in those days he would want me to become a Muslim and being so close with them now and seeing thinking we believed the same thing, I consented. But I didn't join in their religious practices. I didn't even join in their Islamiyat classes because that was a free period for non Muslims. Yet was it a snare to me and could have made me adhere to a path of damnation. But afterwards I began to realise the great difference between the two faiths, particularly given the grievous persecution of Christians in that country. You could by no means reconcile the two faiths when people would go as far as lynching Christians for their faith. And after my conversion when I began to take my Christian faith seriously the whole feeling of identity with Islam had completely died off. Thanks to God who broke the snare.

So parents need to be careful. Children are susceptible to a lot of errors and damaging impressions on them. When you take your children to schools be careful to know what kind of students they are going to be surrounded by. And ensure that they are well grounded in the tenets of their faith and know their catechism properly and hold them firmly as true. This and more are the ways, like the Israelites who were to burn down

images and their groves, are the ways Christians ought to ensure they don't allow themselves to be snared by unbelievers, their practices, and their doctrine. So we are called to be cautious, not to engage in provocative actions or utterances. These require great wisdom beyond what I could advise properly. But the Holy Ghost shall guide us in each given circumstance.

Peace with all men is also the mark of a truly pious and spiritual man. For a man who is in right standing with God has his whole being filled with peace and repose. À Kempis Thomas wrote, “there is no peace in the heart of a man who is carnal, nor in him who is given up to the things that are without him, but only in him who is fervent towards God and living the life of the Spirit.” So peace Belongs to the man who is upright in his walk with God and who is piously living the life of the Spirit. Such a man is full of peace. The abundance of these must of necessity abound to peace with others.

On the other hand, the man that is wicked has no peace to offer others. The man that lives in the flesh and lives a life contrary to God's commands has no peace in himself. In his bankruptcy he has none to give. His conscience is at war with him, and not willing to yield to the voice of his conscience, he himself is at war with his conscience. His every disposition speaks of war, rancour, and disagreements.

We can see this when Cain had slain Abel. Cain disobeyed God in a way I can't pretend to understand. It was about the way he offered his offering to God. But there was something evidently wrong in his approach with which he offered his offering to God and it displeased God. It was evidently wrong because seeing God asked him, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:7). So apparently God expected him to know what

exactly was wrong with his offering. But because God did not have regard to his sacrifice, rather than looking for how to make amends, he became very angry. God seeing this warned him of his displeasure but his anger was so great that it eventually resulted in his killing of his brother Abel. In the abundance of his evil he had no peace, and even when God came and politely asked him about the whereabouts of Abel, he didn't answer politely and peacefully. He retorted, despite the fact that it is to God the Almighty he spoke. If a man retorts when speaking to his fellow that is bad enough. If he retorts when speaking to parents, that is terrible. But to retort to the Living God is quite unthinkable. But in the greatness of his peace-less-ness, he seemed to have forgotten who God was. So it is with wicked men. Because they have no peace they're willing to start a fight over nothing and with just anybody.

Guilt, like the evil spirit that tormented Saul, would drive one to give trouble to even the most peaceful and good people. Saul chased David around despite all the good that David did to him and to his house. There's no way a person with a defiled conscience can have peace. He'd fight with God like Cain retorted to God, and he'd fight with men like Cain killed Abel. He'd seek to destroy a righteous man like Saul sought to destroy David. "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked." (Isaiah 48:22). And if there's no peace to him, how then can he give it? So a troublesome and rancorous disposition is often a sign of a defiled conscience.

Being peaceful is not the only mark of a spiritual man, and being rancorous is not the only mark of a wicked person, for peacefulness can be shown by means of careful pretence. And there are times when, in the strife for righteousness and justice, a righteous man may look like a rancorous person. The Christian

person should not be under any pressure to appear to be a man of peace so as to fail to pursue righteousness and justice. Also, in matters of doctrine we are not to allow ourselves to be under the same pressure so as to let heresy thrive and truth silenced in the name of peace. We have the express command of God to contend for our faith (Jude 1:3). So by contention, which is contrary to what people understand to make for peace, we are to defend our faith.

There are also times when a Christian would pursue peace but an evil person would reject it and still fabricate trouble from nowhere. Of such the Christian person should not feel guilty. I know some may feel that the command to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21) applies here. That is the good they're intending is being overcome by this person who's still creating trouble despite their efforts, meaning they should put far more effort in making peace. But I don't think that applies here. At such times when we can't ensure peace we needn't feel bad. We should even seek, if possible, to avoid such people. The psalmist lamented about these kinds of people when he said, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war." (Psalm 120:5 - 7). We are bound to meet such people everywhere we go for we are in a fallen world.

Furthermore, as righteous people we are not to let peace reign. It is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers..." (Matthew 5:9). We make peace reign. We don't let it reign. The difference between letting peace reign and making peace to reign is that one is done in lazy docility, while the order is done by work. When we meet such people who are always for war, it may require that we MAKE peace through strength. The work required may be to cast

down all their confidence and bring them to their knees for peace to reign. That is how peace will be made. To be docile in the face of troublemakers is to fail to MAKE peace. Such docility is not blessed and is nearer to being cursed.

I've seen people erroneously saying people should let peace reign by letting the wicked go scot free in their evil schemes. When someone lets his animals destroy your farm against reason, rule of law, and scriptures, and you seek redress, they'd say leave the evil man and let peace reign. Many who hold such views are Christians. They also like to pardon people who defraud the public or done evil and later show false remorse on grounds of mercy and peace. But the Bible says, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psalm 85:10). The mercy and peace that are of God are chaste lovers. Mercy has met together with truth and with truth alone shall she stand. She is not an unchaste lover to be walking with deceit. No matter the thing that has semblance with mercy, if it works with deceit, it is not mercy for mercy is no unchaste lover. Peace too cannot walk with wickedness and evil. When people, thinking they're peace lovers try to bring peace and wickedness together, or mercy and deceit, they're pushing for an adulterous union and peace cannot be in such union for peace is chaste. Discord, not peace shall reign. So let's not be fools to stand by in the face of wickedness claiming we want peace to reign. The righteous can never endorse such adulterous unions. Though we should be ever desiring peace, we should never encourage or endorse wickedness with the pretext seeking peace for such peace is not of God.

In essence, we must ensure that the wicked ones that hide in our churches or societies and each harmful action don't go unpunished. The just man seeks justice and justice is the

punishment of wrong and the reward of good. The punishment is aimed at ensuring that there be no recurrence of such evil actions. And in ensuring that evil in society is curtailed and stifled, because of the violence of the wicked, it will seem as though one were a rancorous person, but that should not dissuade us from ensuring that evils of our societies don't go scot free. Peace and lawlessness must never kiss. Mercy must never romance deceit.

Why did God kill Ahab? He was a wicked man no doubt but for his contrition God chose to be merciful to him, however, when he chose to spare the life of the king of Damascus who had done much evil against Israel God condemned through his prophet with these words, "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." (1 Kings 20:42). Not only did God condemn Ahab to death for this thing he misconstrued for mercy, but the entire people of Israel to bondage and destruction. While we must be magnanimous, charitable, and forgiving, we must never act in ways that promote wickedness or endorse adulterous relationships of peace and mercy with lies and evil. You get what I mean?

So why all these scriptural allegories and life examples? Because I have seen that such gullibility is very prevalent in Christendom, particularly here in Nigeria, and such foolishness has to stop. Because we are gullible we are promoting evil and because of us decay and corruption is thriving when we are supposed to be the light and salt of the world. If we as Christians hold a view so harmful to the good of society that corrodes accountability and results in all manner of harm to the society, we ought to be flushed out of society like dung wherever we may be found and gotten rid of like disease. But

the Bible doesn't teach us to work against accountability and foster wickedness. So we, as good members of society, ought to uphold accountability for the good of humanity and never let it slide in the name of seeking peace. We are the salts of the world and salt preserves and prevents corruption. We lose our savour if we choose to work against the good of society and what does the Saviour say? He says, "if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." (Matthew 5:13). May God not cast us out in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm of the private and uninspired (and therefore likely wrong, but maybe right) opinion that Christians should be of two dispositions. They should be ever ready to give peace on the one hand, but should they meet any of these sons of trouble, they should be well equipped to give them all the trouble they ask for and so quell their insolence and MAKE peace. If they don't want peace, then give them a piece of your mind; stern defence and pursuit of commensurate redress for injuries of any kind, litigation for litigation, only don't fight with your fist and don't insult or make derogatory remarks. We should be like our Lord who is not just the Lamb, but he's the Lion and the Lamb. And again it is written of our God whose sons we are, "With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself unsavory." (2 Samuel 22:27). But as I said, this is uninspired and may be considered to go against the command to turn the other cheek, though I guess it does not in truth.

But let no Christian person feel the slightest sense of guilt if he has done anything, even if it is a little, in pursuit of peace and a son of trouble chooses to make trouble still. He hasn't failed in making peace, his peace was not just received because the trouble maker is not the son of peace. Christ commanded his

apostles saying, "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again." (Luke 10:5 - 6). He later went on to say, "But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." (Luke 10:10 - 11). They were not to feel guilty over the unworthiness of others. Upon the discovery that such were found to be unworthy of peace, they were to abandon them.

So, where possible we should just avoid such people. But where you can't, you just have to speak your mind, something which may be considered troublesome if not even vengeful. But I've seen such work in correcting behavioural lapses. So I say Christians should be able to give trouble to the sons of trouble if done to the end of correcting wrongdoings. We must MAKE peace by any just way possible and do this with resolve and tenacity no matter to what extent the sons and daughters of war be chafed. However, in normal times and most times, a righteous man gives peace to those around him.

Conclusion

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."
(Matthew 5:9)

"Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."
(Mark 9:50)

A clear mark of a child of God is seen in the fact that he's a peacemaker. As we have seen, this is not a shallow and outward playing of a Mr. Nice Guy but something rooted deeply in a good conscience towards God. Something rooted in righteousness and absolute obedience to God's word. A perfect reflection of a heart that is at peace with his God. Such peace, none but the children of God have. So we must strive to be peacemakers. If we find that we struggle to be such, it may be a mark of an inward division and alienation of our souls from God. We must examine ourselves thoroughly and address the issue inwardly until we find ourselves being peacemakers naturally.

This does not only mean being peacemakers between ourselves and others, but also making peace between other conflicting parties. Great men of God were ever peacemakers everywhere they took the gospel to. Bishop Leo of Rome was a great mediator who brokered peace in times of war. In time of the bloody crusade, Saint Francis of Assisi visited Saladin with the message of the good news. Martin Rinkert negotiated a peace treaty by fervent prayer and entreaties to end the thirty years war. The occasion of the miraculous treaty is what accounts for

our dear and beloved hymn titled, "Now Thank We All Our God." Throughout his missionary journeys in West Africa, Thomas Birch Freeman was known to be a prolific and effective mediator between warring parties. Just as these great men did in war time, we should also strive to be men that ensue peace at every occasion we see discord. Asking people to shut up or making them do so is not all what peace is about, but going down to the root of the discord and resolving it so that there'd be no more reason for strife. Let us be his instruments of peace. We must both give others peace, and also work peace among other parties.

If we can only walk with God as worms it were absolutely more than sufficient for mere dust like us. How much more sweet and closer shall our walk with God be if we shall walk with him as true sons? It shall be joy unspeakable and full of glory. The moment we are born again we become sons of God. But when we are peacemakers, that is when, according to Christ, we shall be called so.

Let us round of with these words from a hymn:

"Yours the broken heart to heal,
Yours the load of grief to share;
Who their neighbor's woe can feel,
Find their mission anywhere."

---Francis Bottome, Songs from the Parsonage (Cambridge, Massachusetts: University Press, 1894), pages 164–66.

So we are not to be passive peacemakers who only make peaceful responses to others, but these words of Francis Bottome spell to us our duty as active peacemakers. Wherever we find

the broken hearted, let it be our mission to heal it. Wherever we find a person under the load of grief, let it be our mission to share it, thus making it lighter. We should learn to feel the woe of others and share whatever pain they bear. And when we see discord, let us seek reconciliation. Everywhere we go, this should be our mission. This requires a whole lot of sensitivity to notice these things, but with the help of the Holy Ghost, we can both notice these things and care for those in need of care.

Prayer: Dear Father and Lord, you who is the God of peace, yet possessing strength and might as the Almighty, teach us to be people of peace everywhere we go or find ourselves. Help us to make peace in the truest sense, not by mere sounding nice, but by ensuring peace. Help us not to give in to the deception that cowardice or docility is letting peace reign. May we be peacemakers and so be called your sons. This I ask in your matchless name. Amen.

CHAPTER 22: THE IMPORTANCE OF REVELATIONS TO WALKING WITH GOD

"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword."

(Job 33:15 - 18)

Now we shall look at the importance of revelations to our walk with God. We've seen the importance of seeking God in the surest place he can be found, his word. The Holy Bible. But now, we need to look at the importance of a direct revelation from God.

I wished to omit this chapter completely as the knowledge of it may not play a huge role in our heavenward journey. This is what I mean, revelation does play an important role in our heavenward journey, but not the knowledge of its importance. We need oxygen to live, but it is not the knowledge of the importance of oxygen that we need to live. We can live most happily or even more happily without a single idea of what

oxygen is. So the revelation that comes from God is important, but not the knowledge of its importance.

The major reason why the knowledge of the importance of revelations from God may not be so important is because it is the work of God not ours. As I said, "revelation FROM God." That is the revelations that God gives, not what revelations we take. I believe that our responsibility as brethren is to seek to teach ourselves about our duties to God, and having done that we should encourage and spur ourselves on to carry out those duties. We have little business with teaching each other about what God can do or what he will do, except when this knowledge affects what we ought to do. For example, we need to teach each other that God will send all liars to hell, so that we can know that we ought not to lie and repent of it. But where the knowledge of what God can or will do has no impact on the understanding of our duties towards him and how we ought to carry out those duties, we have little business speaking about what God can or will do.

How often have I been bored with sermons where the preacher rattles on about the incredible things God can do. You'd hear something like, "do you know God can lift you up to the post of president tomorrow**?**" or "God can give you a house this year." Of course, any Christian believes that God is the Almighty and so can do all things. Of course he can even turn me right here and now into an angel with wings and a visible halo round my head. What a total waste to spend so much time and energy trying to explain what God can do. That is not much of our business but our business is to know our duties towards him and our fellow men and how to do those duties.

So this chapter is more about what God can do and the benefits

of this to our heavenward journey. These are things that are the natural result of our walking with God. Not things we are commanded to do or have the ability to do. They are things given to us, not things we reach out to get. So this chapter doesn't teach us much about our duties, yet I believe there are few things to still point out here that shall be of some benefit to us.

Jesus Christ himself did not present revelations as something important to salvation. As a matter of fact he downplayed its importance. When he spoke about Lazarus and the rich man, he said that in hell, the rich man pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers that hell and the torment of it is real. But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them. If they don't believe Moses and the prophets, they won't believe even if someone rose from the dead. Someone rising from the dead to warn about eternity is a form of revelation and something supernatural, but such, says our Lord, is not as effective as the Law and the prophets. So Christ places the Law and the prophets above all these supernatural revelations. And for this reason, teachings based on the written word of God are more important to revelations. If we don't listen to these even revelations won't move us to obedience.

Apostle Peter also wrote about his experience on the mount of transfiguration, which was a magnificent and revelational experience where they heard the voice of God telling them that Christ is the Son of God and that they should hear him. Yet after that he said "we have a more sure word of prophecy..." (2 Peter 1:19). Imagine yourself having the mount of transfiguration experience where you see Moses, Elijah, and Christ in his glory. Then you are carried up into glory, surrounded by the cloud of his presence, then you hear God's glorious voice. My! Won't that

be great. Yes, Peter, James, and John experienced this, yet the statement of the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 1:19 informs us that the written word and the obedience of it is of greater importance than every kind of supernatural experiences, including a revelation as divine as that on the mount of transfiguration. So the entire Bible places the simple revealed word above all other forms of revelations. Since we have this, others are of little significance.

Through the Bible we can see that those who walked with God often had a direct revelation to them from God. Either of God manifesting himself in bodily form like he did to Abraham, or his angels appearing to men like he did to Gideon, the parents of Samson, Mary, Peter, etc. And sometimes it is just a message as in a dream or trance. The importance of these things to both knowing the will of God and doing it is apparent in all the places in the Bible where he revealed himself to men. Which is why God doesn't just reveal himself to tickle you but for the purpose of deliverance or expressing his will and nothing expresses that will better than the Bible.

Moses would never have returned to Egypt to deliver the children of Israel had he not witnessed God at the burning bush. Joshua wouldn't have been as courageous as he was had God not spoken directly to him to be courageous. The parents of Samson would not have known how to raise him up had they not been instructed by the angel of God. Peter would not have known that God accepted Gentiles as well as Jews had God not appeared to him in a trance. And it goes on and on. In our heavenward journey it would be also of immense benefit should we, as often as possible, have a direct revelation from God. Yet are these all less to the revelation of his word.

As we have said, obedience is the most important thing we need in our heavenward journey. Revelations are only important where they help us obey God.

Revelation For Instruction And Direction

"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction."
(Job 33:15 - 16)

"All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern."
(1 Chronicles 28:19)

There are different reasons God chooses to reveal himself to us. The first we shall look at is the revelation of instruction and direction. From our main text in Job we see how God reveals himself to man in a vision of the night. But what's the first thing he says is the purpose of this? He says, "Then he... sealeth their instruction." (Job 33:16). The primary purpose of revelation is to give instructions to man.

It is written, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:17). Here we are commanded not to be unwise, and what is presented to us as the contrary to being unwise is being able to understand the will of God. We as Christians, on this account, ought to spend our whole life in the pursuit of the understanding of God's will. Not because we cannot come to the absolute understanding of his

will for his children as revealed in his word, but in every of life's varying circumstances, we must seek to understand his will for us in each circumstance.

Revelation is good for instruction and direction. The Bible draws a general outline for a Christian's life. While the Bible is thorough and there's almost nothing that the Bible does not have definite stance on, yet there are circumstances that we may not be able to tell exactly what God desires of us despite having a good knowledge of all that is written in the Bible. For example we all know that we mustn't steal, and we mustn't commit adultery, etc., but is it God's will, for example, to embark on this or that missionary journey or not. Apostle Paul was vast in the Law, and knew God's will by revelation (at his time the Bible was still in writing), but God needed to reveal to him in a dream where they ought to head with the gospel (Acts 16:6-10). So the revelation was needed for that particular circumstance. Scriptures are full of more of such instances where he gives instructions by direct revelations. The importance therefore is evident. The voice of God directs us and the knowledge that the thing revealed to us is his will makes us do it with more confidence.

It was in the light of this understanding that Frances Ridley Hevergal wrote the following words in her hymn titled, "MASTER, SPEAK! THY SERVANT HEARETH":

“Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock,
In the shadow of the rock.”

She knew that when God speaks and we are sure that he has revealed his will to us in a particular given circumstance we shall be able to follow faster with a step more firm and free. In such a case there shall be no more doubts in our minds both because we know we aren't displeasing him in doing those things he has commanded us, and also because we know his almightiness so that if any hindrances come our way in doing what he has asked us we shall surmount them in his almighty power. So the direct revelation of instruction and direction to us is important in doing his will with more confidence.

In our walk with God, revelations have a way of opening our eyes to certain errors. You know in the process of learning and being taught, some wrong notions do creep in and accord itself the status of a dogma in our minds. Revelations from God can dispel such notions and cast them where they belong; the dustbin of heretic piles. I once held that "forgive and forget" was a scriptural instruction not knowing it just crept into my mind as a wrongly taught doctrine or by just some hear says I may have heard from people. But one day as I meditated and conversed with the Lord, he seemed to remind me of my past as an answer to my question. Then I thought to my self, "the Lord forgave but didn't forget. He's not keeping his own words." But after a while and not seeing anything of that nature in scriptures, I realised that he never gave such a command. This experience led to one of my first published articles titled, "THE FIVE STAR SERMON BY THE RIVER BANK."

When we receive such revelations it should have the effect of making us teach others what we've learnt and therein shall our spiritual experience from God is edifying, and when it edifies that is how we shall know that it is indeed from God, for God

shall not be in the business of what does not edify his own. As it is written, "Let all things be done unto edifying." (1 Corinthians 14:26). You can see how my little experience explained above resulted in an article that teaches. And so it is important to be able to prove these things by what is written else it can't edify.

There was a story I once read of a court hearing in which a man stood up and said to the judge in defence of the accused, "my lord, an angel of the Lord revealed to me last night that this man is innocent." And the judge looking at him in surprise said, "and did the angel of the Lord reveal to you how to prove it?" And when he responded in the negative the judge said, "well that testimony doesn't count here." If God reveals something to you that you feel can edify the church, please also pray for how to prove it by means of scriptures. If you don't know how to prove it, be patient until you know how to. A testimony that an angel of the Lord revealed something to you doesn't count in the court of law so how can it count in the church? For the church has more need of proofs than the court of law.

In my book, "THE LIGHT AND THE SHINING LIGHT," I shared an account of my university days how I chose to read in the library with a female coursemate and when we had finished reading we agreed to come again the next day to read together. In the night as I prayed I felt the sharp rebuke of God for both the decision to read with a female and the promise to read with her again the next day. Truly, the motive to the best of my knowledge was not for evil though lurking within my heart somewhere could be some evil motive. But from my visible intentions I didn't do it to displease God. From my knowledge of the Bible nothing says, "thou shalt not read with a female," so it

was not stealing or lying, it was just innocently reading, but the thing displeased the Lord all the same. Now I'm older and see the foolishness of my decision which should have been ruinous had God not interposed to rebuke me.

I saw through God's rebuke that to draw close to a female is essentially evil except for the purpose of marriage but as said, it's not written in the Bible. How then shall I teach people when there is no text in the Bible to teach others that it is not best to draw close to people of the opposite sex? With this experience and seeing how rife the foolish act of drawing close to people of the opposite sex is in our time, meaning there is a need for people to be taught, the question dwelled upon my mind. And as I continued to read the Bible and other Christian books I was able to come by texts that teach that it is not wise to draw close to the opposite sex. This has resulted in a number of writings including some parts of my book, "THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME," particularly the chapter titled, “RELATING WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX.”

Now, the Bible is the written commandment of God to direct us but we have specific directions by revelations and the Bible is the final authority of the Christian. To disobey it is damnation. While to disobey a direct command against God may not be seen as an actual disobedience, yet is it disobedience all the same and attracts great and severe judgment. Take for example, the written command, "Thou shalt not kill," means if you kill you shall be damned, but what if you get a direct revelation saying, "marry sister Anne." This will look like a mere advice right? I mean it is not stealing or adultery if you choose not to marry sister Anne is it? But while failure to marry sister Anne may not damn the soul like adultery, it is yet a disobedience to God and great shall be the judgment. Probably two years into his marriage he would

look like a soldier that has experienced the shocks in a two years disastrous war.

We have seen how the apostle Paul suffered a great deal for going against the express commandment sent to him by the Holy Ghost and he chose to do his own will. In addition to all that we narrated about his many sufferings and futile efforts. It didn't damn him, but great was the price he paid.

We also read of a prophet in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Kings how he went to prophesy against Jeroboam and his altar and a great sign followed. The Lord had given him a direct command not to come back the way he went and not to eat on the way, but he was deceived by an old prophet and he disobeyed. His death was instant and he had a donkey and lion to witness against him for his disobedience. It was not theft, murder, adultery or anything the like. He only ate but that against God's direct command and he was slain. Not even those he went to prophesy against whose sins were far greater in the practice of idolatry died a sudden death like his with animals standing by as witnesses against him.

What does this all mean? We should never take the direct revelations from God for instruction and guidance lightly. Disobedience against God's command in any form it comes is disobedience all the same. It is to dishonour him, and how more is it to dishonour when he has honoured us to give us instructions personally by divine revelation. It is written, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." (Luke 12:47 - 48). Every act of going against the Master's will calls for stripes

whether done knowingly or unknowingly, how much more shall a man be worthy of stripes if he goes against his Master's will when he knows it. Provided you know it is his will, obedience is required. Where obedience is not observed stripes shall follow.

So divine revelations should be taken very seriously and must always have the effect of edifying not just ourselves but the brotherhood of Christ. And every revelation should have an answer in the Bible.

Revelation Of Divine Doctrine And Mysteries

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)." (Ephesians 3:2-4)

Close to the revelation of instruction and direction is the revelation of divine doctrine and mysteries. Divine doctrines refer to teachings and beliefs that are acceptable to God. And it must be born of God for it to be acceptable of him. It must be a doctrine that he has revealed, else it cannot be acceptable to him. For his ways are not ours and ours are not his. So nothing of all that can come out of our reasoning can be acceptable to him. Therefore such revelations are important. The Bible is a result of his revelations.

Since the Bible has been revealed and contains all the doctrines we are to hold, do we still need another revelation of divine

doctrine? I don't think so, but much of the things contained in the Bible are mysteries. And we need an inward revelation to understand these mysteries. For these mysteries, in the words of Tozer, are truths for the heart and not for the head. You can read certain things and provided it can fit into your head, you understand it. But such are not mysteries. Mysteries require the inward illumination of God to enable us to comprehend it.

Though it be comprehended, it may not be easy or even possible to explain. Why? It's a mystery. How do you explain to an engineer that God parted the Red Sea and the Israelites walked on dry ground? In engineering terms you can't explain it. And if he must believe it, he must first believe in the almightiness of God, which is a mystery in a way. Else there's no way to explain it to him.

One problem of modern day Christianity is that people try to demystify the faith. The Bible clearly says our faith has its mystery. It is written, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." (1 Timothy 3:8 - 9). Mark those words, "Holding the mystery of the faith." How then do we seek to demystify it and wash down the faith into mere theories. The moment we take the mystery from the faith it ceases to be the Christian faith. And if it is a mystery, it can't be fully comprehended by human reasoning. And to understand these we need the inward revelation of God.

It is written as we have seen before, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)." (Ephesians

3:2-4). The mysteries of Christ came to us through revelation, and so must it be understood by revelation. If the very faith which we must hold to walk with God has its mysteries which must be understood by the inward revelations of God, then that revelation is key to a successful walk with God.

Some form of revelation of God's will is also required in matters of disputations which eventually become doctrines of the church. In the Bible, when there was a debate about circumcision, the apostles held the first Christian council of elders. And after this council came a set of doctrines pertaining to what the Gentiles should observe and what they should not. By the initial revelation of God to Peter and his experience with Cornelius the centurion, they were able to determine what the stance of God was and so drew their doctrines. The same with the Council of elders in Nicea. The elders debated with the heretic, proved him wrong, and God showed his approval of their agreement by the mysterious sudden death of the heretic. Such revelation of his will was able to guide the church forward in times of debate and uncertainty. Even in our days if it be proved to be from God a revelation can lead us to a doctrine we can follow as it is written in Galatians 3:15, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto."

Such revelation is also required in the personal Christian life. God needs to guide us on how we pilot the affairs of our lives. This is how we can have the guarantee of a good life. But as matters of doctrines aren't a personal issue, doctrinal revelations revealed to us personally should be explained to others for their edification with scriptural backing. This is why the study of books of other Christians is also important for us as we journey homeward. The accounts of their personal revelations edifies us.

Revelation Of Future Or Impending Events

"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword."
(Job 33:15 - 18)

"Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people."
(Psalm 89:19)

The next we shall come to is the revelation of future and impending events. Revelation of future events helps us to approach the future with confidence. The knowledge of God as revealed in his word ought to cast out all fear from our hearts, but because we are often so fearful and disbelieving, we sometimes need a revelation of impending future events to reassure us that God is in control. This helps us to approach such events and go through them with confidence, assurance, and heavenly guidance. The verse above tells us that God gives us revelations to keep us humble, to deliver our souls from the pit, and to deliver our lives from perishing by the sword. Life is full of pits, things that inspire pride, and swords that slay, so the revelation of these things would help us and guide us in the way we should go to keep us from unnecessary harm and tribulations.

Another benefit of future revelation is that more often than not

it is for remembrance. Christ said, " But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you." (John 16:4). So the future events Christ told his apostles about were for remembrance and not for foretelling. He told them ahead of time that they may remember and so take courage when those things begin to happen. And this has the effect of assuring us that going through these hard things Christ told us about we can be sure that he's in control. If all that he has spoken about these hard times are coming true one after the other, we can be sure that our eventual salvation which he said shall be in the latter times shall definitely come to pass. So there are immense benefits in these revelations that can help remember that it was revealed earlier.

I suppose this aspect of revelations in particular is of great importance because life is full of so many events that shake and trouble us so much that we shall begin to doubt God. If we don't have the assurance that comes through such revelations it would be hard to maintain a steady walk with God. We may as well turn aside to things our feeble minds advise us to resort to when it is shaken and troubled.

Now this also tells us that we shouldn't be in the habit of trying to foretell future events by interpreting scriptural revelations, seeing that Christ revealed them for remembrance and not for foretelling. Foretelling sometimes is just a way of showing off that one has insight into future events. And having read many myself, I see that nearly all foretelling of future events turn out wrong. So, let's avoid it as much as possible.

Revelation Of Eternity

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."
(Ephesians 1:17-18)

Revelation of what eternity is like is what we come to next. By eternity I mean both revelation of hell and of heaven. A glimpse of what eternity is like is able to play a great role in our heavenward journey. I do not like the idea of hinging our confidence of making it home to anything outside of the Holy Bible and God's saving grace, whether or not they are revelations. The Bible alone provides more than sufficient knowledge to be saved and the death of Christ on the cross is more than able to save all who come to him through the knowledge of biblical truths. So our main effort is to dig in the truths of the Bible, seek to understand it, and when fully understood through God's grace, to obey it fully by the same grace. Not in pursuing dreams and thirsting after revelations.

So, to think that revelations can save or the absence of it damn a soul is unwise. However, where our senses are dying and our love growing cold, the revelation of eternity can wake us up from slumber and renew a dwindling hope. The revelation of what hell is like can reawaken the fear and dread of God's judgment, and revelation of heaven can reawaken the earnestness with which we long to depart from this world and to be with Christ. Such earnestness spurs us on in the way of righteousness

and perseverance.

Revelations can cure us from spiritual blindness of which spiritual blindness is always fatal. Jesus said in Matthew 13:44, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." Without the man first SEEING the treasure he wouldn't have bought the field even though it cost him just a fraction of all that he had initially. He bought a field of great price with all he had, and that with joy, because he was able to first SEE. Many sell the kingdom of God for the little mundane things of this earth because they can't SEE. They who can SEE would not lose eternal bliss for anything in this ephemeral life. And where one is suffering from such blindness, the divine revelation of eternity may cure it totally.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “we desire a thing more ardently in proportion to the certainty of our knowledge of its goodness, and the warmth of our delight in it.” We desire eternity more when through revelations we come to know with more certainty about it. Reading about the glories and wonders of heaven as well as the terrors and torments of hell is enough to make us think and see aright to choose and live aright. But because our ears are dull of hearing and our vision is often clouded by the worries of this life and the carnal things it offers, eternity begins to look unreal and unsure. For this reason, because they have little knowledge of the goodness of blissful eternity and aren't certain that it will be, many may trade blissful eternity for things of naught. But if God should open our eyes and grant us but a glimpse of it and to taste if it were but just a little of its goodness and feel that sense of certainty, we would begin to ardently desire for it.

History tells us of how martyrs would embrace death with so much joy. Yet others fled from the slightest persecution and denied their Lord. Why? The one had eyes that could SEE the wonderful treasures of eternal bliss and knew that in death they were being introduced to this bliss, while the others could not SEE beyond this present life and thought that in death they were losing all. I heard of one particular story of some Christians being slowly tortured to death. Some bore this slow torture and died. But one of them, thinking of all the sufferings he's been through and other things he's losing in his dying, chose to deny Christ as his tormentors had demanded. But while he denied Christ, the eyes of one of the soldiers tormenting him was opened to SEE the immense glory of eternity, how those who had endured to death were being crowned, and how a crown of gold was being taken away from this Christian that just denied his Lord, he exclaimed and said if this is how eternity is for the Christian he's willing to die in the place of the man that had just denied his Lord. And he was killed in his place. Why did that happen, the man who denied his Lord was spiritually blind, and the soldier who chose to die in his place had his eyes open by means of spiritual revelation.

Here's a word from one of the letters of Samuel Rutherford, "Sure I am, if ye knew what were before you, or if ye saw but some glances of it, ye would with gladness swim through the present floods of sorrow, spreading forth your arms out of desire to be at land." So divine revelations by which we could have glimpses of eternity can help us persevere and continue to the very end. Yet I suppose simplistic obedience itself still gives us a richer taste of eternity than even revelations for our spirit being joined to him begins to feel the aura of heaven though we are still in the body of this carnal world.

Fortification Of Convictions

"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me."
(John 16:1 - 3)

"By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."
(1 Peter 5:12)

Now having a revelation from God of any kind fortifies our faith and grants us more convictions. Whether they be revelation of eternity, impending future events, or that of directions or instructions, they help to fortify our faith.

I must have shared my experience with a roommate who was a staunch Muslim and how he almost swept me off my faith at some time in the past. Because of my little learning at the time and the heaps of lies he used to present his points I had nothing to really defend the reason for my faith. But the only thing that held me in place was that God in his graciousness had given me a number of divine revelations at the time of my conversion. And the radical change in my life from bad to good was one I could not deny. Though I had no reason, based on little knowledge, to hold that Christianity is the true faith, yet those divine experiences I had made me know that even if I had little knowledge, yet this faith wherein I stand is the true faith. Later on in life when I began to give myself to studies I realised the

lies this my Muslim roommate had used to try to trick me. Where knowledge failed, the convictions that came about through divine revelations held me in place.

So these divine revelations are very important to us on our heavenward journey. They are important in whatever form or for whatever purpose they come. Each time we have these divine experiences it further convinces us and fortifies our faith in God. As Christ says, "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe." (John 14:29). By means of these revelations, though things go in ways we never thought they would and our faith be shaken, yet shall we believe and because our faith has been fortified.

Does God Still Reveal Himself Directly To Us

"... but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."
(Deuteronomy 29:29)

"And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."
(Isaiah 40:5)

So does God still reveal himself to us directly? The simple and short answer is yes. Is he forward to doing so? The simple and short answer is also yes. God is ever willing to speak to us and reveal himself to us directly as there shall be a need for it.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children FOR EVER!" You heard that? FOR EVER.

I'm not a believer in the hyper spiritualism that believes that we can be so spiritual as to bring God down to our house and call his name and he'd answer us verbally anytime we call it. Some people believe that prayer too ought to be a conversation in which you're speaking to God and he's answering you on the spot. And the conversation goes on as if you were talking to the guy from the next door. But this is not a spiritual belief at all as it is not even scriptural. I spoke against this form of belief in my book titled, "PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST," in the chapter, "THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER." Please refer to it to have a clearer understanding on the matter. So I'm not seeking to present hyper spiritualism to us which is not even spiritual in the first place.

A.W. Tozer, in one of his sermons, presented the fact that if Jesus was introduced to us in the Gospel of John as the Word, it informs us that God is ever willing to express himself to man, including through spoken words. So we need to be conscious of God's desire to speak to us. God knows that our lives need his ordering to be well lived, and so gave his Word which became flesh and dwelt amongst us. He also gave us his word which is the Holy Bible. Why, so that we may have an ordered life that professes the beauty of his peace. Should he then after doing all these be reluctant to speak to us by divine revelations if the need so arises? No, he won't be reluctant.

And we have a promise from Christ himself that we shall be taught of the Holy Ghost when he says, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my

name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26). He shall both teach and cause us to remember what he has taught. He's not going to come down by human means to give us a lecture in a classroom, these teachings and the means by which he will cause us to remember are both done by divine revelation.

God has said in Jeremiah 33:3, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." If we will call upon him in prayer, he will reveal to us great and mighty things. That is an assurance. He will only refuse to show us those things that are insignificant for our heavenward journey or things that can be injurious to us. But he is ever forward to reveal great and mighty things to us.

It is written, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." (Philippians 3:15). This was said with utmost assurance and with no hint that the revelation will be revealed with some level of difficulty. And when he says God will reveal even this, it means that this is considered a light matter but that even such a thing will God reveal to them. If he will reveal even this, then he will reveal all other things to us as the need requires. Here Paul was talking about everyone being of one mind, but he says here that if people have varying opinions about things, God shall reveal the truth that they are all to hold unto them. So this signifies that God is forward to reveal himself to us even in matters of controversies. This also informs us that divine revelation is also useful for Christian unity.

The prophet Amos also wrote, "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the

prophets." (Amos 3:7). This tells us that God doesn't have the mind to hide things from his prophets. We are his prophets of today for the spirit of prophecy dwells in us. The same way he said concerning Abraham, "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do." (Genesis 18:17). God wanted to destroy Sodom but he couldn't hide it from Abraham because Abraham was his friend. And if Jesus calls us his friends saying, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:14 - 15). By the virtue of obeying his commandments we become his friends. Shall he then refuse to reveal things to us when required? No, God is ever faithful and forward to reveal himself to us.

So God still speaks and reveals himself by divine means to his children. And he's even forward to do so. In a case where he doesn't reveal himself directly to his true children, it means it is not required or not in the best interest of those to whom he hides his revelation. And the child of God should rest content, secured and assured in such a case. It is an act of reverence to God to accept his choices even when they're contrary to our desires.

Gaining This Revelation

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."
(Matthew 5:8)

"And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory."
(Exodus 33:18)

As a follow up on what we have discussed in the previous section of this chapter, we shall now ask ourselves, how do we experience this revelation? First we must start with a warning. Don't be too eager for divine revelations lest the Devil reveal himself to you and you accept it to be God without testing the spirit just because you're so eager to experience a divine revelation. The Bible does tell us that the Devil is able to reveal himself as the angel of light. It is written, "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Corinthians 11:14). So let us be careful. Divine revelation does not come by craving for it.

Martin Luther gave his experience of how he got to see Christ in the flesh while praying. He wrote:

"I being on Good Friday last in my inner chamber, in fervent prayer, contemplating with myself how Christ my Saviour hung on the Cross, how he suffered and died for our sins, there suddenly appeared upon the wall a bright shining vision, and a glorious form of our Saviour Christ, with the five wounds, steadfastly looking upon me, as if it had been Christ himself corporeally. Now, at the first sight, I thought it had been some good Revelation: yet I recollected that surely it must needs be the juggling of the devil, for Christ appeareth unto us in his word, and in a meaner and more humble form; therefore I spake to the vision in this manner: "Avoid, thou confounded devil; I know no other Christ than he who was crucified, and who in his Word is pictured unto me." Whereupon the image vanished."

Concerning this vision Luther commented saying, "I do depend,

and desire no new revelations. And more steadfastly to confirm me in the same resolution, and to remain by God's Word, and not to give credit to any visions or revelations..."

Not many are spiritual like Luther. The Roman Catholics sometimes like to claim that they see the apparition of Mary. Well let's pretend to believe them, for showing that we doubt them one makes it known that he or she sees them as liars or people capable of lying. Even when they do tell lies, we should at least assume a belief to hear them completely that we may also judge their claims completely. The apparition they talk about is just of the "Mary" standing still, not talking, not moving, just appearing and causing people to shriek. Should that be at all true, it could only be the workings of a devil, for should it be from heaven, it should be for edification of some kind not just to cause panic or excitement. A sane person might as well comment, "Wow we saw Mary just standing there doing nothing. She must be so eager for us to see her in her new dress. But poor Mary, maybe she isn't getting enough attention above." The very devil behind the apparition must have been exhausted having gone beyond his ability to make the apparition, for if it were not so, he should at least be able to make her talk, move, or do something other than merely appearing. Had they the spiritual understanding of Luther, they'd have said likewise, "Avoid, thou confounded devil...." and it should vanish. Sadly they cherish it and share the news assuming it's true that they're really beholding the apparition of Mary the mother of Christ.

Just so you know, the Mary the Catholics worship isn't the mother of Christ but a demon whose worship predates the birth of Christ. When they worship this Mary and even call her sweet names, I tend to think they wish to incur the wrath of Joseph

who wedded her while in the flesh for such sweet names are only adequate when the intent of using them is to woo a woman. One of the many sweet names they call her is the queen of heaven, but the queen of heaven is a demon as it is written, "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger." (Jeremiah 7:18). And to this God was so furious saying in the next verse, "Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched." (Jeremiah 7:19 - 20).

So let's be careful not to be so desirous of divine revelations and so accept every apparition as a divine revelation from God. Let us be more focused on his word and simplistic obedience than craving for divine revelations. In seeking divine revelations, let us know that our Holy Bible is a bundle of endless revelations, let us resort to it and seek to know its content above seeking to have peculiar revelations to us. Apart from this, no true revelation can contradict the Bible. If it contradicts the Bible in the most minute way, we can be sure that it is not from God. So let us seek to know the contents of the Bible richly. Therein are endless revelations that are ever new.

George Croly (1780–1860) wrote in his hymn the following words:

> *"I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies,*
> *No sudden rending of the veil of clay,*

No angel visitant, no opening skies;
But take the dimness of my soul away...

Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame;
The kindling of the heaven descended Dove,
My heart an altar, and Thy love the flame."

This is an expression of a deeply spiritual man. What is most important to the Christian man is not exciting divine experience but to love God which means to obey him, and to have an undivided heart filled with only one holy passion. This is the most important thing for the Christian man to crave.

That said, so how do we come by true revelations of God? Christ says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8). Purity is the key. Not only will the pure see revelations from God but they shall see God himself. Ours is to maintain purity of heart and the vision of God shall to us from him. But when our heart is impure and we live in disobedience we shall not see even a glimpse of him.

As we have seen at the introduction of this chapter, revelations are a natural part of our walk with God. When we walk with him we get to hear directly from him from time to time. He will not hide anything from his friends. When God was intent on destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, he said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do." (Genesis 18:17). And two verses later he says, "For I know him..." (Genesis 18:19). In saying that he knows Abraham he declares that he's familiar with Abraham. Jehoshaphat said to God in prayer, "Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for

ever?" (2 Chronicles 20:7). Mark those words, "Abraham thy friend." God owned him saying, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." (Isaiah 41:8). Mark those words, "MY friend." Lastly it is written, "... Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." (James 2:23). Christ has opened the door for us to be his friends saying, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:14), as we have seen in the chapter on friendship with Jesus. Just as God revealed himself to Abraham and would not hide anything from him, so also shall God reveal things to us plainly if only we'd maintain a good friendship with him. Our focus therefore should be on maintaining that cordial friendship with him. And we know that this friendship is hinged upon our obedience to his commands. So our focus as Christians is to please him in all that we do not on seeking divine revelations.

À Kempis Thomas wrote, "The more a man hath unity and simplicity in himself, the more things and the deeper things he understandeth; and that without labour, because he receiveth the light of understanding from above." We get more revelation when we have unity and simplicity in ourselves. There's no man more divided in himself than the Christian who can't rise above sin. The unbelieving man is more united in himself though he be a sinner because he's united in his sins. But the Christian is partly holy and partly sinful. Let us maintain a life of purity, rising above sin and all things the Holy Ghost hates and we shall find ourselves being able to receive divine revelations from God.

So what is our part to play when we need God's guidance? When we have maintained a holy life and a pure heart, we come to God in prayer asking him to reveal himself to us. Prayer is the next key. It is written in John 3:27, "John

answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." And Christ tells us of how to receive saying, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Matthew 7:7 - 8). But only the pure can see God.

Apart from praying and being pure we need to be especially careful to be humble. "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." (Matthew 11:25 - 27). God reveals himself more to the humble and lowly than to the proud and lofty, that is if at all he reveals himself to them for he hides it from them. We need to know that revelation itself is able to puff up, and so when we show a tendency to be puffed up, God shall hide his revelation from us, which is a good thing. It is better to be without revelation and be humble than to be with revelations and be puffed up. For this reason he gave the blest apostle Paul a thorn in his flesh. He had received wondrous revelations from God, and what does he say about this? He says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." (2 Corinthians 12:7). Lest we should be puffed up, God may choose to hide his revelations from us and guide us by other means.

Moses, the pure and meek man of God, prayed that he may see the glory of God as it is written, "And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory." (Exodus 33:18), and God showed him his glory like he did to no other man, for God said concerning Moses, "Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:6 - 8). If we too shall be pure, meek, and prayerful, God shall show us himself and the mysteries of the present world and that which is to come.

But we need to know why we want him to reveal himself to us. Is it just to excite ourselves, or to have what to tell others "the Lord revealed to me...", or because we don't want to live our lives living one day at a time. I remember as a young person I always wanted God to tell me every single thing that will happen in my life. Exactly what profession he wanted me to pursue, exactly where he wanted me to live, exactly who he wanted me to marry, and so on. But by his dealings with me I know it is not his will for us to have the foreknowledge of just everything. He did reveal some few important things to me which were of utmost importance, but he revealed most in a vague way that it was only after it had happened I could, "oh this was what God told me about." These created in me an assurance that God knows all that is happening to me and that they are all part of his plan. This assurance gave me boldness towards life and assurance that I live in God's care. But God wants us to enjoy the beauty of living one day at a time. I wrote about this in my article titled, "YOUR LIFE'S A BEAUTY."

So let's not be the type of people that want to know everything about the future but trust that he who holds tomorrow holds our hands. We should only seek for his revelation to understand his word, to understand his will for the present, and at times when we need his guidance, and let him reveal himself to us at other times according to how he, in his matchless wisdom, sees fit.

God's divine revelation is especially needed in our study of his word and to know his will. So this is the chiefest reason why we should pray for it. The psalmist wrote in Psalms 119:18, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." We need the opening of our eyes by the Spirit to understand scriptures. It is for the same reason that apostle Paul prayed, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." (Ephesians 1:17). Here Paul places wisdom and revelation side by side. Because wisdom comes by revelation and they are both given, not attained.

We also need God's revelation in cases where we need his particular guidance. It is written in Daniel 2:27-28, "Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets..." It is God who reveals, but Daniel had to pray. Not to amuse himself with the secrets but because he was in a case that the knowledge of the secrets was required. So praying for revelation, God revealed it to him.

Where God does not speak, we should say as the apostles said, "The will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:14). This is to mean we hand over everything into his care having done all we can or should. Furthermore God is able to guide you without a divine

revelation. It is a demonstration of reverence to accept the will of God even when we don't feel happy about it. It is a demonstration of reverence if we let him choose the means by which he chooses to guide us. Either by his divine revelations or by any other means. We must rejoice in his will.

I have witnessed God directing my path in diverse ways. There was a time when I was still living with my mum and she was being very difficult to live with. Before this time I had a job and so only saw her briefly in the morning and briefly at night therefore it was a bit easy to get along. However I lost my job under the most unfortunate circumstances meaning I now had to live with her in the house two four seven and she became a thorn in my flesh. Not caring about the trauma I was going through as a result of losing a job I was really satisfied with to becoming jobless so suddenly, she let herself be a source of grief to me. It was not that she did this out of a desire to do me wrong, but just by some rather human fault that any human could have and could cause a problem to any grown up still living with his or her parent. But she pestered my life and it was mighty grievous.

I prayed to God in my grief that I needed a house of my own. He heard me and answered me but not by giving me a response like, "okay my well beloved son. I have seen thy pains and have come to instruct you on how to get a house. So take down this number..." Rather how I got to the house I now live in and I'm so happy with just came by funny events. I got an invite to an event in which there were such important dignitaries like the former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, his vice Atiku Abubakar, the incumbent president of Ghana at the time, and other top dignitaries. The event was on a Thursday and I made up my mind not to miss the event at all cost. But on the

Tuesday of the week of the event I jumped out of bed, looked at my time, saw that I was already late, took my bath in a haste, to save time I got a private taxi rather than taking a public transport, when I got to the venue I rushed to the hall, but lo and behold it was empty. I was just twenty minutes late at the time I got there and I wondered what was wrong. Even if the event finished at the same time it started the hall couldn't have been empty at only twenty minutes after. Something definitely was not right. Had they changed the venue? So I decided to ask someone I saw passing by where the event was to hold and he said, "the event is not today but on Thursday." Then I realised how silly I had been. I was so pained. Having to come to an event like that meant I had to miss my night work which I did miss, I also burnt more money on using a private transport to make it early. Thinking of the whole thing made me really sad as I started back home. But as I was approaching the gate, a question came to my mind, "you saw that there was another event going on in one of those halls, instead of going home without achieving anything, why don't you just attend that instead?" The thought of it gladdened my heart and knowing that to go home would be a colossal waste of time and money, it was easy to summon the courage needed to attend an event I wasn't invited for. So I got there with all boldness and introduced myself and gave an answer to every question they asked at the entrance of the event hall and granted me admission into the venue. To my great amazement they were discussing on housing problems of the country and their effort to help reduce as much as possible the housing deficit of the country. The burning issue in my mind was housing and here I was by accident in an event where so much was being said about all the questions of my mind. When I heard of the affordable houses they had built, I showed interest and got the address of the company that organised the event, paid them a

visit, and they connected me to an agent and I got the house which I'm now living in. A wonderful amazing place to live that suits my style of life and tastes so perfectly well, except for human problems.

So by such a funny accident God answered the burning prayer of my heart. Not by telling me, "Ayo, my son, I want you to attend an event at such and such a location tomorrow. I know you were not invited but summon the courage to just attend. There you will have answers to your heart's desire." No, he just guided me by another way (yet just as sure) to where he wanted me to be.

In the same place where I now live I had seen an estate selling lands to interested buyers. I was interested in owning one but had limited funds. The sellers told me that I could pay by installments but I should at least pay half the amount. When I looked at the plot, there was a particular plot I was interested in because it was quite big. I had more than half of the price, but because at this time I didn't have a job with a fixed amount coming in every month, I chose not to risk going for a land I wasn't sure I'd be able to pay up for without inconveniencing myself. So there was this other land of which I had just above the total cost of the land at the time. This land was slightly smaller and had a drainage cutting through the land at a corner and didn't have a regular shape. These seeming issues made people shy away from it. But when I calculated the size of the larger side of the land and discovered that even that was bigger than some other plots, I decided to go for it. Just about a week after I had paid the half of the cost of the plot I got a barrage of money into my account, some of which had been delayed. Had I waited, the amount of money I now had would have been just a bit more than the total cost of the bigger land I was

eyeing. I felt bad saying, "if only I had waited." But when I completed the payment of the land and was now rejoicing in the fact that I now had a land of my own, I started studying it to see how best to utilise it. It was then I realised that that particular land was the very best plot on the whole estate and the one I was eying just for size's sake was about the worst. If I had taken time to study the estate plan and was thinking clearly, I would by all means have chosen the one I bought. By God's guidance I got myself a perfect plot whose merits others were blind to and even shied away from. And since I got a lot of money shortly after, completing the payment for it wasn't hard at all.

At the time I moved to this place the road was terrible. It was all thick mud in rainy season and dusty off-road in dry season. So no season saves you from distress, it just configures and modifies it. Riding on it in any weather would break your waist in ten pieces, and if you drove in a car you'd be shaken so violently that when you get to your destination you'd flow out of the car to the ground like thick liquid. It was horrible. So at this time the lands were cheap because interest must have been low. But just about the moment I paid the first installments the state government started building the road that came all the way and very close to the gate of the estate where I now live, and the marks of intentions to build a road right to the estate where I now have a land. So the value of the land shot up by about double at the time they started building the road and must have gone up way more. There's probably no way I'd sell that land, but by God's guidance I got it at the perfect time at the best price for its worth.

So here again, he didn't tell me, "there's this plot I want you to buy and now is the perfect time because the prices would soon

go up." He just orchestrated everything in a way that I had no choice but to buy it, and when I'd have gone for an inferior land he held back my money and released it only when I'd made the initial payment for the best land on the estate. And once I paid, the construction of the road commenced, shooting the value up and meaning I have a land in a very good section of the state.

God moves and guides us in mysterious ways. Whatever method he chooses to guide us is up to him and in reverent gratitude we should accept his choices. If he was willing to give guidance on an issue as seemingly trivial as where to live in this ephemeral world, how much more shall he guide us on issues that border around our eternal abode.

Conclusion—

"All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."
(Luke 10:22)

Revelation is not our duty to have and so we needn't spend so much time trying to educate ourselves on how to have divine revelations. God reveals himself to us at times when he sees best to. Let us be more concerned about learning our own duties to him and be more interested in carrying out our duties to him than to be concerned about the things that he can do. I don't think this can be stressed enough. These are the works of God which he does. Not like what we do such as picking our Bibles

to read, going on our knees to pray, etc. We do these and let God fortify our faith in the best ways he in his wisdom chooses.

If there's anything we should hold on to in this chapter, it is that God reveals himself to the pure and meek, teaching us that if we fail in our duty of living a pure and meek life we'd not hear from him. Those to whom Christ will reveal his Father to are those that do his will. Let us be more concerned about learning and doing our duty. In the next section we shall be speaking on intimacy with God, and the things we've laid down here are good for a balanced understanding of some of the things we shall be talking about.

As a way of wrapping up this chapter let's take a look at some hymns. Here's a verse from Eliza E. Hewitt's hymn , in The Primary Sunday School Hymnal:

"Ever living, loving Friend,
Now to Thee our songs ascend;
Make us pure in heart, that we
May the heav'nly vision see."

And here's the full lyrics of a hymn by Frances R. Havergal (1836–1879):

"Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth;
Master! let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
What hast Thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master,

Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock,
In the shadow of the rock.

Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! For O, Thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need:
Speak! and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak! and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
Master, speak! O, speak to me!"

Amen and amen.

Prayer: Dear Father, we pray that you shall guide our path by means your matchless wisdom dictates. Reveal yourself to us and open our understanding to know your will and word. And when we have known your will, may we find the grace to do them to the uttermost. This I pray in the dear name of your Son. Amen.

SECTIONAL HYMN

The Master Calleth

By Walter J. Mathams (1853–1931)

Christ of the upward way, my guide divine,
Where Thou hast set Thy feet, may I place mine;
And move and march wherever Thou hast trod,
Keeping face forward up the hill of God.

Give me the heart to hear Thy voice and will,
That without fault or fear I may fulfill
Thy purpose with a glad and holy zest,
Like one who would not bring less than his best.

Give me the eye to see each chance to serve,
Then send me strength to rise with steady nerve,
And leap at once with kind and helpful deed,
To the sure succor of a soul in need.

Give me the good stout arm to shield the right,
And wield Thy sword of truth with all my might,
That, in the warfare I must wage for Thee,
More than a victor I may ever be.

Christ of the upward way, my guide divine,
Where Thou hast set Thy feet, may I place mine;

And when Thy last call comes, serene and clear,
Calm may my answer be, "Lord, I am here."

SECTION 4

INTIMACY WITH GOD

CHAPTER 23: INTIMACY WITH GOD

"... we have seen this day that God doth talk with man..."
(Deuteronomy 5:24)

Now that we've seen what it takes to walk with God, we shall now look at intimacy with God. Intimacy means close familiarity or friendship. Mind you, I do not say close overfamiliarity. To enjoy the fullness of the joy of the presence of God we need to come to him in an intimate friendship, which if it be true intimacy with him, the High and Lofty One, cannot lead to overfamiliarity.

One of the reasons why Christ is choosy is because he doesn't want a casual friendship. The two things he wants to characterise our friendship with him are permanence and closeness. Permanence meaning he wants a never ending and never waning friendship. And closeness meaning he wants the friendship to be characterised by the sweetness of intimacy. It is therefore a strange thing that after all the efforts Christ has put in to ensuring a sweet and intimate friendship that a Christian would fail to relate with him intimately.

Intimacy is beyond just shallow fellowship with God. It is a deep loving relationship with him. It is keeping an ongoing and frequent conversation with God. It is knowing him firsthandedly. It is not mere going to church or reading books and hearing others talking about him, as important as those are. It is getting

to know him for yourself. It is not merely about having others teach you about him, it is being taught of him directly as you maintain that sweet and loving friendship with him.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine of Hippo wrote, “...not generation, but regeneration makes Christians.” He went on to say, “A regenerate man does not regenerate, but generates, sons according to the flesh; and thus he transmits to his posterity, not the condition of the regenerated, but only of the generated.” While having Christian parents who know God intimately or being surrounded by people who know God richly and intimately is a great blessing, we must make sure that our devotion to God is on a personal basis rather than only relying on experience of parents or other elders. For the fact that they are Christians doesn't make us Christian at all. That is what Aurelius Augustine is talking about. Parents can only generate. They can't regenerate. Whereas the generation does not make a Christian. So spiritual Christian gifts don't get transmitted from parents to their young. The young must come to God personally, in a loving relationship. He mustn't worship from afar relying on their parents' experience or that of others to keep their relationship with God warm.

We've noted before that A.W. Tozer in one of his sermons explained that when it is written, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1), it expresses the fact that God is ever willing to express himself to man by the medium of words. How true, for even if God shall not reveal himself to man by verbal words, he is ever expressing himself by his written word. And indeed God does speak verbally to man too. As it is written, "And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath showed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the

fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth." (Deuteronomy 5:24). We enjoy the riches of his words by drawing close to him.

Furthermore, it is written, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:16), and, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27). The way in which his sheep recognises him is by his voice, revealing further to us that his forwardness to relate intimately with his own.

To enjoy the sweetness of friendship with God we must work towards intimacy with him. In this section we are going to be talking about some of the things that drive us into an intimate relationship with him. His own must therefore listen for his voice. But before we go into those, let's talk on few things as a preamble.

Have You Found Enough Of God?

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."
(Philippians 3:10)

No matter how intimate you get to be with God, we should always ask ourselves, "have we found God enough?" At what point can one truly say he has found enough of God?

Moses was a man very personally intimate with God and it seemed God was even proud of it, for he said to Miriam and Aaron, "Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses." (Numbers 12:6 - 8). Moses was so favoured of God that he enjoyed intimacy with God to this extent. But was he satisfied with that? No!

It is written, "And Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." (Exodus 33:12 - 15). The man of God used the fact that he has found grace in God's sight as reason to know God more and prayed for the permanence of God's presence.

This same zeal we find in other men of God that they desire to know God more despite knowing him to a great extent beyond what any man has ever known him. Herein we find again another paradox. That in desiring to know him we get to know him, and in knowing him we desire to know him more. For the knowledge of him does not give us a complacent satisfaction but the desire to know him even more.

From the experience of the men of God, we can see that there's always more of God to enjoy. He is the inexhaustible fount. There's always more of him to experience and enjoy. For this reason you'd always hear our blessed hymn writers using expressions like, "closer to you," not "very close to you," "nearer to you," not "extremely near to you," This is because there's always more of him to enjoy. Even though you have come exceedingly close to God, as the pious men and women that they were, the way they could still express themselves is still in the comparative not the superlative. Because the riches of his fount can't be exhausted and the belly of sweet fellowship can't be filled.

Let us see for an example the words of one of these blessed hymns by David J. Beattie:

"Saviour, draw me to Thy side,
Nearer still, nearer still!
There would I in peace abide,
Nearer still, nearer still!

More than life Thou art to me,
Dearer still, dearer still!
Daily grows my walk with Thee
Dearer still, dearer still.

Refrain

Draw me closer, Lord, to Thee,
Let me now Thy beauty see;
Help me, Lord to know Thy will,
Draw me closer, closer still."

We can see how expression could be given to his desires only in the comparative and never in the superlative. There's always more and more of God to enjoy.

The Dangers Of Following From Afar

"And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire."
(Mark 14:54)

Failure to have an intimate friendship with God places us in a state of danger. To have a casual friendship with God is to walk dangerously in the right path. It is refusing to walk on a bridge and rather choosing to walk on the rope of it.

Jesus says in Matthew 13:20-21 "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." The person that received the word in stony places heard the word and made the right response to the word he had heard, but fell off on account of persecution. It is not the persecution that made him fall away, but the fact that his root wasn't deep. His root had not gone into the depths of intimacy with God. The result of shallowness and lack of intimacy in one's walk with God was that he couldn't endure.

The Laodiceans were Christians quite alright but they had the

testimony that they were neither cold nor hot. And this made Christ say he felt like spewing them out of his mouth. When we come to God in a loving relationship, let us choose to be intimate with him with an ever increasing intimacy. As had I said, one of the reasons why Christ is choosy is because he doesn't want a casual friendship. A casual friendship with God may not last and if it lasts it will be with the distastefulness of lukewarmness.

One example of the dangers of following Christ from afar, by not knowing him intimately, but by relying on the intimacy of another, either parent or so called mentor, is that you could be bought. Just as Christ paid for your salvation with his blood and redeemed you, if you follow Christ from afar you could be bought back from Christ. Here's why I say so. It seems to me that the Devil is very specialised in buying members and followers of deceased vibrant men who knew God intimately. After the demise of these men, he buys whatever is left behind by the deceased and so entraps many of his followers. Had they followed Christ closely they wouldn't have been so bought.

One that is extremely appalling is Chautauqua. Born of very Christian and visionary men that served the United States immensely. I was amazed by the wondrous ways they helped to shape some of the greatest minds of the United States. It was a place frequented by dignitaries. Presidents of the United States, either past, serving, or to be, visited Chautauqua in person. Yet in years to come they have become a Sodom advocating for all manner of evils and depravity. They stand particularly against the Bible in almost each and everything they do. Those who followed the ministry while it served Christ and not Christ in person would have been bought over to start holding the heap of nonsense they now hold and seek to promote.

Another worth mentioning is RZIM. I don't know those who took over RZIM founded by the late Ravi Zacharias, but the ministry began a series of godless actions even against their founder after his death. Thank God for his son who is fighting tooth and nail in defence of his father's name. I have seen a number of such kind of ministries that immediately after the decease of the pious founder, criminals and sons of hell take over and use the ministry to an evil purpose, and if we look further we may see more of such ministries that has either fallen into the hands of heretics or scoundrels.

All people who follow men rather than God would over time be wooed into heresies or swept away by the godlessness of scoundrels except they have their feet grounded in Christ's way. It would have been good to be enjoying the sweet and healthy spiritual meals served by these ministers while they lived, but they should have gone to the Giver of the mana himself. At the time when the source of those healthy meals dried up by virtue of the death of the faithful minister, they could withdraw from the derailed ministry and rely wholly on the mana from above. This way the Devil can neither woo them nor sweep them away.

So knowing God one on one and entering into an intimate relationship with him is non negotiable for the Christian who must have a successful walk with God. Jesus testifies concerning the sheep which he shall admit into his kingdom, "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." (John 10:4 - 5). The sheep knowing his voice speaks of intimacy. This intimacy shall guide the sheep in the path of truth. Because they know his voice they'll not follow a

stranger. When ministries fall into wrong hands, and when men fall, they'll not be carried away for they'll notice the change of voice and step back away from their pernicious ways.

Conclusion

"And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."
(Exodus 33:15)

We need to develop an intimate relationship with God. Our successful walk with him relies on this. Failure to do this, even if we know him and choose to live in his ways, would amount to taking a bridge leading in the right direction but choosing rather to walk on the rails of the bridge. Even if we are the best tightrope walker in all the world, it would of course mean disaster when the wind blows.

In this section we shall be talking about driving ourselves into that intimate relationship with him. It is my prayer that as we read we shall find ourselves growing into an intimate, deeper, lovelier, and sweeter relationship with our Maker. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Father, as we delve into this new aspect of this book, may you open my eyes to see the ways I ought to draw closer to you in an intimate and sweet relationship with you. Help me not to follow you from afar but to walk closely by you and learn your voice. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 24: CONSECRATION

"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."
(Revelation 18:4)

The first thing we shall be looking at is consecration. Consecration means set apart for God. This also entails separation from the world. If we seek God we must be set apart for him and from the world. Surely we cannot separate ourselves from the world completely but we can control the level of our association with the world. Paul said "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world." (1 Corinthians 5:9 - 10). Even Christ didn't pray that his own should leave the world. He prayed, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John 17:15). So if we will separate ourselves from the world, we must leave the world, which thing is impossible except by death, neither is it the Lord's will while we're in the flesh. We will leave the world someday but it will not be in the bid of not wanting to associate with the world.

In his book, "Wholly Sanctified," which I really recommend on this subject, A. B. Simpson wrote, "The very meaning of the

word “church” is “called out” or “separated,” and to each individual the same call comes still.” So when the church and the individuals that make the church don't live a sanctified and separated life, we are living contrary to our calling, contrary to the sole essence of our purpose.

A. B. Simpson also wrote, “Sanctification brings the soul into harmony with God and the laws of its own being, and there must be peace, and there can be in no other way.” To be in harmony with God and even with ourselves we need to be completely sanctified. Not partially but wholly sanctified. We may run here and there in search of peace not wanting to be wholly sanctified, but we shall only gain the wind. Frustration and painful realisations would marr our life's joy. The only way to gain peace, perfect peace, is to be wholly sanctified.

The things we wish to discuss here therefore are very important and should be paid close heed to. There's so much to gain in taking heed to it, and so much to lose in failing to take heed to it. It is expedient therefore to pay close heed to these things. So let's jump right in.

Maintaining Our Distance From Sin

"... Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."
(2 Timothy 2:19)

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."

(Proverbs 8:13)

The first aspect of the world to mention that we are to depart from is sin. We must separate ourselves from sin. This we do by being obedient to his will as we have discussed in an earlier chapter on friendship with Jesus. This is therefore a reminder. A. B. Simpson wrote, "We are to separate ourselves not only from our past sins but from our sin, as a principle of life."

We can't become intimate with God except we depart from sin. It is not so much as him pulling away from us as much as it is that our own hearts condemning us and causing us to pull back even when we are not consciously aware. With sin comes judgment and every moment we spend in God's presence reminds us of this impending judgment. The natural man therefore draws back and seeks to hide from his God at each time he realises he has gone against his will. This fear and the act of drawing back are often subconsciously done. Knowing judgment is imminent, our very being perceives him as an enemy, and being in enmity with him we avoid him. We see this same thing with Adam. He withdrew from God and hid himself when he realised he had sinned.

God himself pulls away from the sinner in what I suppose is an act of love, for he is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). To give the sinner time to repent and amend his ways he pulls away from him lest he consume him. So sin has a devastating effect in separating the lover and the loved. It works both in the lover and the loved to pull them apart. In the lover it works in love to make him depart to give the beloved time to repent and in the loved it works in fear to make him pull away. The only way the lover and the loved can be reconciled is to take that sin and throw it away.

Maintaining Our Distance From The Appearance Of Sin

"Abstain from all appearance of evil."
(1 Thessalonians 5:22)

Apart from this we also ought to depart from the appearance of evil. The Bible spells this out for us where it is written, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Many pious Christians content themselves with just abstaining from actual sin, but don't see why they should abstain from the mere appearance of it. "If my motive be right," they tend to say, "why then should what others think matter?" If only we understand that we bare the image of Christ we would be far cautious about what people think lest we misrepresent the holy image of Christ. For his name's sake we must avoid the appearance of evil, even when we mean good.

Not many people would give you the opportunity to explain that you don't have anything to do with the lady you're always walking with. Yes you guys may have been discussing about the importance of being ready for the Lord's coming. Glory! Hallelujah! And amen! But who else is hearing your conversation? People will jump into conclusions and that damages the image of the body of Christ. I hear someone say, "if they judge that way, then they're at fault because their judgment is wrong." But I say, "no, even in the unlikely case

where they are wrong, it's not their fault but the fault of him who showed no discretion in the way he conducts himself in the view of others."

Does this now mean that the caution we should show is to hide away while we talk to that lady, when our intention is good? No, for one of the four walls that enclose and conceal you can crumble and fall, or some one may burst into the room without knocking and they see you. They'll say, "Ah, they appear holy outside, but they're keeping company in secret. So the best thing is to follow the Biblical injunction to abstain from even the appearance of sin. And furthermore, an isolated conversation between a man and a woman easily leads to actual sin even if the original motive was pure and absolutely holy.

I once saw a Sunday school student of mine hugging a girl in church and I wasn't happy with the sight. When I got to see him to talk with him I showed disapproval of his actions, but he said she was his sister. As said, nobody would give you the opportunity to explain. There is no indicator pointing down over her head written " his sister", so even at that it remains an appearance of evil. People should be warned, there's a particular age a girl approaches to it becomes inappropriate to hug her as an opposite sex except you're her spouse. There is this claim of suggestive behaviours being "innocent." For example in Barney and Friends, they sing, "I love you, you love me... with a great big hug and a kiss from to you. Won't you say you love me too." And this song is sung by children and watched by children. People claim it is innocent. That isn't innocent. Hugging a grown up girl except she were a spouse of the hugging party cannot be innocent too. There comes an age where girls start having their assets developed right? At that stage it becomes inappropriate to be embracing them. So having a girl as a sister or a boy as a

brother isn't enough reason to be hugging a person of the opposite sex. I wrote more about this in my book titled "INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME" in the chapter, "PIETY, CIRCUMSPECTION, AND INNOCENCE."

When the Bible says we are to abstain from the appearance of evil, it means as a Christian we are to stay clear of whatever we perceive would make anyone think we are doing evil, irrespective of the fact that we didn't intend evil. Let us not be like the irresponsible people who like to say, "let anyone think what he wills, it's not my problem." We are responsible to a very great extent for what others think about us. Your Lord and God commands you to make it your problem. So take the problem, make it yours, and solve the problem.

Lastly, keeping away from the appearance of evil is a great way to keep away from actual sin. For example sexual sins don't just happen. Things build up to it. A man can't just jump out of his house and walk right into a woman's house who he doesn't even know and lie on her lap like Samson and commit fornication. It doesn't happen like that. You probably won't fall into a sexual sin if you've maintained a good distance from people of the opposite sex and avoid keeping an ongoing conversation with them. You probably won't fall into a sexual sin if you'd never be found in an isolated space with a person of the opposite sex. You'd probably not fall into a sexual sin if you don't embrace a person of the opposite sex. So, apart from the image of the body of Christ which is at stake, avoiding the appearance of evil is a mighty fortress against sins of any kind.

For this reason, it should be the standard of the church to judge her members by the appearance of their actions and not by the motives of their hearts. Each individual should train himself to

be discreet enough to know how he appears in the perception of others. If any would not walk in the discretion of walking cautiously so as to avoid the appearance of evil, he should be treated as though he meant to do the evil his actions suggest.

Not only are we to depart from actual sin and the appearance of it, but we are also to depart from the things that are capable of leading us to sin. A. B. Simpson wrote, "Sanctification then means our voluntary separation from evil. It is not the extinction of evil, it is the putting off, the laying aside of evil, the detaching of ourselves from it and placing an impassable gulf between." To place a gulf between us and sin entails severing ourselves from places and people who could lead us to sin. There can be no separation from sin without placing such a gulf between us. We'll talk about this below.

Keeping Our Distance From Non-Christian People

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."
(2 Corinthians 6:14 - 15, 17)

We must maintain a good distance as much as we can from all of the world both secular and non-Christian religious people.

When we keep distance from people who don't share our faith as much as possible, it must not be in a sense of feeling superior or being religiously bigoted. But to relate with them only when absolutely necessary. We must also be careful not to do this in ways that are obvious and are likely to cause offence. We have spoken on similar issues in the previous section in the chapter, "FOLLOWING PEACE WITH ALL MEN," but we shall talk about them as it pertains to consecration.

I suppose that of all the generations of Christians that have ever been on the surface of the earth this generation is the closest to the world and that to our peril. My supposition may not be likely completely true as all that I have been able to read about from the apostles down to this time are far from being all the records we have of Christians down the ages. However, from my observation Christians never had close and lasting relationships with unbelievers. Paul must have had a lot of encounters with tent makers who were unbelievers but we were not told of him working together with anyone except when he met the Christian couple (Acts 18:1-3).

Isaac Watts wrote:

"May I with those for ever dwell
Who here were my delight,
While sinners banish'd down to hell,
No more offend my sight."

Sinners to his sight were an offence. The fornicators, the adulterers, the thieves, the murderers, and other sinful categories of men offended his sight. Every devoted Christian too should have a mind as this that sinners become offensive to their sight. Not the kind of offence that brings about hate, but one that

would make us pull away from their company as much as possible.

This same mind was in the psalmist when he wrote, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word." (Psalm 119:158). This is not a malicious hatred towards the transgressor, but grief about their actions, "because they kept not thy word." The man who must be sanctified must have a profound hatred for sin and be grieved at the sight every time and any time he beholds it. He must hate it first and foremost in himself, and hate it in others also.

While we must love even the sinner and desire their salvation, we must be careful not to have them as much as possible in close association. Today there are those who think that it is by being friendly and associating with unbelievers that we could save them. I suppose that is very foolish and a very lazy and cowardly method of evangelising. True evangelism is how we make efforts to save sinners and not by having them as best friends, close associates, etc. Pick up your Bible, prepare your point, spend time in prayer, go from house to house and preach the gospel, and spend another time again in prayer about what you have preached. That is where love is and not in frolicking around unbelievers. It is a sad thing to see a believer have something to do with an unbeliever beyond what is necessary.

Isaiah 26:10 says "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord." This is a confirmed truth. Favouring the unrighteous by being friendly with them won't convert them. Even bringing the unrighteous to church is an awfully wrong way of trying to make converts. Bringing the unrighteous to church with the hope of converting

him is not Biblical and is not the apostolic pattern of evangelism. They went out to preach, and those who were converted joined the church. Nobody brought unbelievers to church.

Some today say that they can marry an unbeliever so that they can win them to Christ? Marriage is not a method of evangelism. That type of futile evangelism ruined Samson. If you don't know how heartbreaking the story of Samson was, remember his post as the judge of Israel and think of a much beloved president of your country grinding corn and doing sports for an insurgent. Very heartbreaking. That is what such a futile evangelistic mission brings. It made Ahab a wicked man beyond what he could have been. Israelites like Boaz were not destroyed by their marriage to foreigners (or unbelievers) as the Moabite had initially declared "your God [the God of Israel] will be my God." I suppose even if one is to marry an unbeliever recently converted or converted for the purpose of marriage, they ought to first of all get the outward sacrament of baptism.

One Denneth, an Australian, lamented how Christian ladies from Christian homes married non-Christian immigrants. He narrated how a lot of these weddings became very sour. I myself have seen a woman who was a committed Christian but somehow married a Muslim. All I saw in that relationship was not conversion from darkness to light but battery, mockery and humiliation in which the man will from time to time bring home another Muslim man to join him in battering his Christian wife. Sad sad story. Why must we allow ourselves to be blindfolded and become sheepish in our reasoning? Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). You don't need to understand Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic, to understand that verse.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

During one Easter retreat, I had a witness in my spirit from the Lord to pray for our leaders to quit childishness. I had thought he meant our political leaders but when I experienced a strange happening in the retreat, I concluded he meant those who assume leadership positions in the church. The strange thing occurred during a time in Nigeria when there was a major religious crisis in Jos of Plateau State in which there was a gross blood shed. Killing of Christians and clashes between Muslims and people from the church was rampant at that time and place. And here's the strange thing; a church leader brought a man from Saudi Arabia who was a Muslim, an unbeliever, up the pulpit and introduced him to the church so graciously and said he was doing this to promote peace. I knew that God was displeased at this action. Let the bloodshed continue if it will, for these things must happen as the Lord has said (Matthew 24:6), but let us not sin against him. Must we seek friendship with the world for "peace's" sake? What union does light have with darkness? Is God not able in the right time to bring peace to all the world? Must we devise our own means of bringing about peace, and sinfully pursue it? Is that not the same evil the

Israelites which worshiped Baal were guilty of. They left God to seek prosperity and victory over their enemies from something other than the Lord Jehovah. So is peace better to us than to holiness? Shall we seek peace from any other than the very Prince of Peace? He clearly differentiated his own peace from the peace of the world (John 14:27). Shall we then forsake his peace and pursue that of the world? The preservation of our lives and property is of more value to us than walking with God in white. Let us not fool ourselves, we will reap only vacuum in befriending the world.

Separation from the world is not hostility to the world. And so, while we must be cautious about our closeness with the world, we must be careful we have a right understanding of these things. The great Christians which chose not to have fellowship with unbelievers were in no way hostile. They were friendly. It was the unholy people who were hostile. The unholy pope ordered the killing of Mohammedans, but the holy man, Saint Francis of Assisi disagreed with the pope on this, went with the Good News right into the band of Saladin, met with him and talked one on one for a long time. He did not have him as a continuing companion, nor did he bring him into the fold of God's people, but went out with the gospel to him. This is love indeed. When he went back to his own disciples, he was angry at the fact that they now owned properties contrary to his style of life which they had chosen to follow within the short time he had left them, he brought them back to their devotion and had a continuing relationship with these, not with Saladin. Such were the actions of holy men. They loved in the truest form of it and never confused love with the sheepishness of frolicking with the world.

Today, the world will host a peace program and among the

invited guests will be church leaders, secular men and heretics, and they will all be asked to speak on similarities between the faiths and find a point of unity where they can all agree. How silly. Late Ravi Zacharias, a man I respect so much from the little I've heard him speak, will not so much as agree with heretics or attempt to find an unexisting grounds of concurrence with heretics but will debate with them. But some spiritually sheepish men will go and talk on the peace which they know nothing about looking for points of compromise amongst different faiths and heresies. The actions of Ravi Zacharias, and other prominent apologists are to be imitated, for therein is love. Not the silly acts of supposed dialogue.

In our schools, who do we choose for friends? Unbelievers or believers. If we must walk with God, we must have a cordial relationship with believers and abstain from unbelievers wherever possible but remember to preach to them and pray passionately for them. Remember also to seek the peace of your countries the right way; on your knees and in persisting in doing the right, turning the other cheek where the one is struck. Not by frolicking with the world.

King Solomon wrote, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." (Proverbs 13:20). If we don't want to be destroyed, we must abstain, as much as reasonably possible, from people who don't hold our convictions with us, whether they are religious men or irreligious men. The fact is holding a view contrary to the Christian view, or to profess to believe the scriptures and walk contrary to it, is foolishness. Anything, whether by unbelief or outright disobedience, that causes us to walk contrary to God's word is foolishness, and the recipe for destruction is to be a companion of the foolish.

To the young ones who may be struggling with sin of any kind, the simple solution to all your problems may just be to avoid the company you're keeping. The psalmist wrote, "Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God." (Psalm 119:115). He knew that in their company he could not keep the commandments of his God so he had to shoo evildoers away. Shooing evildoers away is essential if we are to do the will of our loving God. To live a holy life we must depart from the unholy.

The problem of today is not only do we have non-Christians with Christian names like Paul, Peter, Matthew, etc., we have pastors, deacons, choristers, ushers, teachers in the church who are not Christians. What do we do? Do we avoid them like unbelievers or do we maintain friendship with them? We've seen in the chapter on living in peace with all men that we are to avoid sinful people who are called brothers more than we do the unbeliever. We're given leave to have a good but limited relationship with unbelievers but to completely avoid the brother who is a sinner despite identifying with the brotherhood. Paul says that if we are to avoid living with unbelievers altogether we would have to leave the world meaning it is impossible to do so. But because the world has become churchy and the church worldly, we have to still leave the world if we have to avoid people who bear Christian names and are yet sinners. It would be near impossible to live in this world without keeping company with these. I believe that their biblical names don't make them any more a Christian than the man who bears a non-biblical name. So I think we may still relate with them on the same ground with which we relate with unbelievers. The reason I say this is that in the days of the apostles believers were not known by names because I'm almost certain that no one will be

bearing names such as Peter, Paul, Barnabas, etc. named after the apostles on religious grounds at the time except he was an infant. So I do not suppose that using names as a yardstick for identifying a believer was in the mind of the apostle when he said that we should not keep company with those who call themselves believers and still live in sin, while we may even eat and relate with the unbelievers.

The main thing is if he himself identifies as a Christian or is popularly called such and it is accepted by him, then such, when he or she exhibits clear immoral tendencies, we must avoid him or her more than the unbelievers. However, I suppose there are true Christians who become immoral because they've wallowed too long with swines. Your holy conversation with them may wake them up out of their slumber and get them out of that mire. This I mean mere conversation on holy things not going with them into their sinful deeds. We must be careful lest we fall into their error. It is written, "And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." (Jude 1:22 - 23). So, though they are immoral, we have a command to have compassion and seek to save, but with fear.

The fact that they at least hold the Bible to be true gives you a common ground for a holy and constructive conversation, unlike unbelievers. You could, by your conversation, move them and press them to a point where they'll know that they ought to either leave the faith or change their ways. Often, even the most sinful Christian won't wish to leave the faith. Many sinful Christians who are so by name only are the way they are because they've been deceived to believe that it is okay. Others have seen people who they held in high esteem doing things

they never thought a Christian could. One of such persons who had witnessed people who identify as Christians doing things so contrary to what she had grown up to believe approached her pastor and asked, "sir, is the heaven and hell we used to believe in when we were younger still real?" You can tell that such a soul is on the verge of backsliding into unbelief, not because she despises the word of truth but because of the behaviours of others. So speak to them about what the Bible says and why they should change and they may likely change and be encouraged in the path of good.

Such an endeavour must be done with fear for even the conversation with an unbelieving person is an enticement to sin, and we are told, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path." (Proverbs 1:10 - 15). So we must avoid as much as possible the conversation with them when we know it may entice us to sin. All our guards must be up.

One major problem I personally have with keeping an ongoing conversation with unbelievers is that it must be done with so much care. And the caution I have to take in talking to them is too tedious and strenuous for me. Why won't I just keep an ongoing conversation with believers instead and save myself the stress? I'm not that spiritual and I'm not so vast in scriptures, but with the little of scriptures I read, I find it hard to keep up a conversation (even secular) without having to make some reference or allusions to the Bible. Something I have to be

careful to avoid when talking with unbelievers.

I recall talking with one of my friends by the name Benjamin. I asked him of when he intended to get married. He said he wasn't sure and indicated that he didn't have such things in his mind yet. Then I poked fun at him that he is so old and still has no plan to get married yet. I then told him that he's very unlike the Benjamin of the Bible who got married at the age of 10. And we had a good laugh. But the laugh may have not been that good had it been with an unbeliever.

Psalms 91:4 says, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." When we love the truth and walk in it, it protects us from evil friends. If they that love the truth have few friends, it is because there are few good people to have as friends. Just like making reference to the Bible won't afford a good laugh with an unbeliever, in a way it has shielded me from them. My manner of conversation would repel them far from me and bring them only as close as is necessary. If we shall learn to intertwine our conversation with the truth of what we believe, that truth shall shield us from bad and ruinous company.

So on a concluding note, we should relate well with those who aren't of the faith when we encounter them. We should deal with them in love, compassion, respect, and every dignity, but not that we would be forward to keep company with them even when there's absolutely no need to do so.

Abstaining From Worldly Pleasures

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."
(Titus 2:11 - 12)

Now we also need to abstain from worldly pleasures. By worldly pleasures I do not refer to pleasures in general. Some think the Bible forbids us from enjoying pleasure, but this is not true. We are not told to shun pleasure, whether great or small, for any reason. But we are told to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. So by worldly pleasures I mean sinful pleasures.

It is written, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15 - 17).

We have talked about the need to abstain from sin and the appearance of it, but there are some pleasures that may not be defined as sinful but are yet worldly and ungodly. We must depart from these too. By this I mean we must avoid living a hedonistic life.

Isaiah 5:11-12 says, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the

tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." These things mentioned here are acts of hedonism brought to the extreme, but the condemnation is not even in them per se but in these words, "but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands."

To be able to please God and come into intimacy with him, we must be able to make sacrifices on many grounds and that would mean we must cut off excesses as though they were sinful. For example the Bible does not outrightly condemn drinking wine, but it condemns getting drunk, nevertheless a man who's devoted to pleasing God and walking with him would be a teetotaller. There's nothing wrong with feasting and enjoying music, but to be done in excess for the sole purpose of seeking pleasures and for such an elongated time, which would mean one won't be able to use his time for profitable things, probably praying and reading the Bible, is wrong. The Lord says, woe to such people who spend their time this way.

Hedonism is a great fault today that I've noticed is growing at a rapid rate in the Christian fold. I noticed particularly how it is on the rise in children from Christian homes. We need to watch against it and caution our children against being hedonist. A hedonist can't walk with God for hedonism is enmity with God.

Conclusion

"Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second."

(Hebrews 10:9)

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."
(1 Peter 2:9)

Sanctification means being set aside for God's use and therefore being separate. It is attaining a speciality status. Maintaining this status is essential for being intimate with God. We must separate ourselves from everything he hates and from people, things, places, and circumstances that can lead us to things he hates. We must put a gulf between us and the things he hates.

If we don't keep away from these things we can't be intimate with God. Remember that Christ is the choosy one. Before being friends with you he had carefully chosen you and presented the conditions of friendship to you. If you falter on that condition you can't be friends with him, not to mention being intimate with him. He can't on account of his friendship with you keep close to things he hates. He can't on account of you tolerate sin. If you won't hate sin and put a gulf between you and sin, he will also stand back. He can't, on account of you, company with wicked and depraved people. Leave the world and come to Christ the Lord. Therein shall you find peace with yourself and with him. Therein shall you find an intimate relationship with him.

Let us end with a word from A. B. Simpson:

"Our anger may be so pure that it will be a holy zeal for God. Our emulation may be so free from envy that it will impel us to

imitate the noble qualities of others. Our acquisitiveness may be so regulated that it may be lifted above avarice and covet earnestly only the best gifts. Our ambition may be so heavenly that it will be an impulse to others, pressing us forward to the most noble achievements and most enduring rewards, and every throb of joy and sorrow, hope or fear, may be a movement of the heart of Christ along the various chords of our consecrated being, until every voice within us will join the heavenly chorus, singing evermore, "Blessing and glory and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever."

So, on this note we bring this chapter to a close. May God sanctify us and give us the grace to keep this speciality status in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: May the good Lord grant us the grace to follow him utterly and to separate ourselves from this dying world and to cling to the brotherhood in holiness. May he teach us to fulfil his will according to his purpose and in his wisdom, not in following our vain thoughts but in being steadfast in his Word. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 25: MOVING WITH THE PILGRIM BAND

"... follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."
(2 Timothy 2:22)

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."
(Hebrews 10:24 - 25)

To be intimate with Christ, we must draw close to where he promises to be. It is written, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20). On this note we come to companionship with the brethren, or, since we are talking about the heavenward journey, moving with the pilgrim band. To experience the riches of Christ's presence we ought to ensure that we find ourselves in the midst of the brethren on a regular basis. There we shall find Christ and become more intimate with him.

When we are called out of sin and the world and everything God hates and is enmity with him, we are not called to isolation. Phew! As humans we are a social being and it is relieving to realise that God did not command us to be isolated.

When the COVID scam first started, I worked in a school and schools were among the first things that were asked to shut down by government mandate here in Nigeria. I was very angry with this decision, but having to stay at home afforded me time to rest from work and do things at my own pace. However, when they increased the restriction to mean you couldn't even leave your house, I was tormented in the isolation. I pounced at the very first opportunity I found to leave the house. The first opportunity was still a form of isolation, but an isolation with my colleagues. What a relief it was. I felt for the first time in my life that I really needed people and to associate with them. This is our nature, and in calling us to be sanctified God didn't intend to break this very important aspect of our nature.

It is written, "... follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22). We are to follow all the things that make us friends with God and sanctified "with them." This we call the pilgrim band. So to be intimate with God we must move with the pilgrim band having come out of the world. So the Christian life is not a life of isolation but a life of fellowship. We must have times of fellowship with others and God. But a Christian fellowship is a fellowship of "them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:22). The moment we, for any reason, start admitting into our midst profane and godless people it ceases to be an ideal Christian fellowship. So let us mark the people who call on the Lord out of a pure heart and move with that band. It is expedient in our intimate walk with God.

The apostles of our Lord were men who didn't take the issue of moving with the pilgrim band lightly. They always sought to find themselves in such a company. It is written, "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the

chief priests and elders had said unto them." (Acts 4:23). This was before the great revival which saw the place where they were gathered shaken, and they got filled afresh with the Holy Ghost. Everywhere the apostles went they sought the company of fellow pilgrims. The moment Saul got converted his first aim was to join the pilgrim band. It is written, "And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus." (Acts 9:19). The moment he left there to Jerusalem, it is written, "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples... And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." (Acts 9:26, 28). They never thought light of their fellowship together with other saints. This was because they knew and were fully conscious of its blessedness.

As we said in the previous chapter that keeping company with fools would lead us to destruction, and so must be wary of our associations with unbelievers and sinners. On the other hand we must be conscious of the blessedness of walking with the wise which comprise the pilgrim band. It is written in Proverbs 13:20, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." So we shall become wiser each moment as we move with the pilgrim band.

1 John 1:3 says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." One of the core essence of preaching the gospel is so that those who believe may "have fellowship with us." It is to join the pilgrim band. This verse before also refers to what is termed "the communion of saints." Something A.W. Tozer points out is different from communication of saints. It is having something in common with both the saints around and those

which have gone on ahead of us to eternal bliss. And this fellowship that is beyond communication (as we know it) is not just with saints around, saints above, but also with the very "Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," the chief members of this holy communion. And so it is written in Philippians 3:20, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:" So our communion is not restricted to this world alone. To live a good Christian life we must maintain this blessed communion with God, his saints above, and his saints below.

WARNING: the pilgrim band (saints on earth) is not a band of perfect men, neither is it a band that entails exclusively of pilgrims. I saw a post on Facebook that read something like, "refusing to go to church because of hypocrites in church is like refusing to go to the gym because of fat and unfit people who go there without trying to get fit." I completely agree. So remain steadfast with the band even if you encounter hypocrites and have unpleasant experiences from time to time.

In the company which Thomas absented himself were not perfect saints. They were Peter the denier of his Lord and other disciples who abandoned their Lord. They were not men in good standing, yet there was a difference between them who fellowshipped together (though it comprised of imperfect men) and him who absented himself. Let us not leave the fellowship of brethren just because they are not in good standing. God can restore them at any time and it is not hard at all for him to do so.

In maintaining companionship with the brethren one should not seek to leave because one finds fault with the gathering. A gathering has little power to affect your standing with God though it can greatly enhance it principally because of the core

reason behind having such a gathering. The thief for example seated in front of you in church can do little to move you into the habit of stealing because the essence of your gathering was to learn about holiness. So if one chooses to depart from a gathering, except they're overwhelmingly depraved, he's losing a lot by absenting himself from where he can gain a lot and have no risk of losing. When I say overwhelmingly depraved I mean in a case where the depravity is one that can influence you especially by the mere sight. This often has to do with provocative dressing, especially by women, etc. If it gets that serious and the church is doing nothing to curtail it and you yourself can't attend church service without avoiding it, then it would be wise to absent yourself from such a fellowship. But first try to correct those things where possible. But if they be stubborn, then let them be.

There is almost always no reason why a person should leave a church or excuse himself from a church except in extremely rare instances where he may not be able to gather with other Christians. That is if you, for some reason, find yourself in a place where there is no church. For example in a staunch Islamic country. For such a case Richard Baxter advices, "The more you are deprived of the benefit of God's public worship, the more industrious must you be, in reading Scripture and good books, and in secret prayer and meditation, and in the improvement of any one godly friend that doth accompany you to make up your loss, and to be instead of public means." This is the only rare instance I can think of. Of such people Thomas Kelly (1769–1855) wrote in his hymn:

"When on the mighty deep,
He will their spirits keep,
Stayed on His Word;

When in a foreign land,
No other friend at hand,
Jesus will by them stand—
Jesus, their Lord."

Where one has no means to fellowship with other believers Christ shall be there with him. But where possible a wise Christian must always find a means to fellowship with other Christians.

Here is a hymn by Herbert Kynaston. I made reference to it in my book on Christian dressing and there's no harm making reference to it here again. It emphasises the importance of gathering together. It goes:

"O, enter then the Temple, when
The Lord still passes in;
The one without was first to doubt,
The blessing last to win.
O cruel! must thy hand be thrust
Thy source of life so near;
Thy Lord assail, hard as the nail,
Unkinder than the spear?

Yet, see, He comes with peace again,
With only peace to all;
No breathing now upon the brow
Where soon the fire shall fall:
Scarce will that eye His wounds descry,
No hand He now extends;
How should that flesh be probed afresh
Here, in the house of friends?

So now, thy Lord, thy God confess,
Believe and worship, too,
And first adore—yet they have more
Who deem the witness true.
Thy faith has been but what was seen—
Blest they who still believe
What eye nor ear shall see or hear,
Nor heart of man conceive!

O, on my body, not on Thine,
Lord Jesus, let me see
The blessèd marks of love divine,
Which Thou hast borne for me;
Compunctions sweet on hands and feet,
The pierced, the open heart;
Or e'er, without one faithless doubt,
I see Thou as Thou art."

As we have said, this company from which Thomas absented himself was not a perfect company, but see the dire effect absenting himself from their gathering had on him. His absence from fellowship won him that potentially eternal name of "doubting Thomas." See how unkind and cruel it made him disposed towards his Lord to seek to probe his flesh afresh here in the house of friends. Were the wounds he incurred from the Romans by the influence of his enemies the Pharisees and chief priests not enough. Yet Thomas sought to probe it afresh. Oh how cruel could he have been to think such. All this because he absented himself from their gathering together. Don't be like Thomas in forsaking the gathering of saints.

It is written, "But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that

they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit." (Jude 1:17 - 19). One of the marks of the godlessness of the last time shall be found in people who separate themselves. Many will do it with the pretext of the church having people who don't fear God and seek on this grounds to justify their wilful separation. There is usually no reason to break fellowship from a church though great may be their flaws. So I'm not a fan of people jumping from church in search of a place where they claim the word of God is being preached well, not to mention isolating oneself with no one to fellowship with.

However, if one must leave, one should try to identify with another church. Staying in isolation is never a good choice unless one went on a journey to where there are no Christians at all to fellowship with. And I don't think there is any such place under the sun that one can travel to for any reason. Or one be locked up in a house arrest or in jail. These are really rare circumstances and so there's almost no good reason whatsoever to allow oneself to be isolated. It is really sad that we have many churches so much that we could be choosing one over another, but you may be able to find another that would better serve your spiritual need when the church you attend presently has completely left the path of scriptures which they claim to hold to. The only way to be guided aright in such choices is if you yourself have a vibrant personal quiet time with God.

A person in the church is a million miles closer to heaven than a person outside the church. I'm not here trying to justify the practice of bringing unsaved people to the church so that they can be saved. Let them be saved first before they join our assembly. But let everyone that wishes to walk with God and

make it to heaven see that he makes it his duty not to forsake the gathering together of the brethren.

The psalmist wrote, "Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing." (Psalm 92:13 - 14). This speaks of the blessedness of fellowship. Mark the words, "those that be planted," signifying being permanently fixed. Not moving about and thrown about. There is a blessedness in such blessed fixation. It says they shall always bring forth fruit even in old age, and be fat and flourishing. As far as our Christian walk is concerned, even in old age we shall bring forth the fruit of righteousness.

Apart from the spiritual benefit there are countless other benefits why one should maintain his fellowship with the pilgrim band. You may run into certain needs and they'll be there to help when they're disposed to. My first job after I left the university was given to me by a church member. And even the brief time I worked before I went to the university, my employer was a church member. When I ran into some financial crises while in the university, the church at least once brought me foodstuff which was a life saver. When I fell seriously sick and isolated, still in the university, they visited me, cared for me and brought me fruits which after eating set me on a path to recovery.

The psalmist lamented how it seemed to go well with the wicked and go bad with the righteous. It grieved him dearly but he wrote, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." (Psalm 73:17). The psalmist found solace from pain in the sanctuary of God. I too have witnessed such a peace in the midst of the storm when I go to church. There was a time, after my university days, I felt this extremely crushing depression

and anytime I fell into such depression, coming out of it would be extremely difficult. It's burden was always so heavy on my heart. But on this occasion I went to the church and mere seeing the beautiful faces of the brethren made the depression to depart instantaneously without a trace of it left behind. Peace and joy flooded my soul immediately. It was simply a miracle. I could not point to a reason here or there that I could say was responsible for the disappearance of my depression. Mere faces couldn't dispel depression for I had been seeing faces everywhere I go to no avail. So what was it with these faces in church that made them so special so much as to wrought a miracle?

To maintain a good fellowship each member must seek to be thoroughly grounded in scriptures and hold them firmly, for so we are commanded to do (Proverbs 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2 Timothy 1:13, Titus 1:9, Hebrews 4:14) but very flexible in the interpretation of it. It is easy for schism to occur when people hold tenaciously to weak unlearned personal interpretations of scriptures especially when this is done zealously, on the other hand if one chooses to be slack on everything it results in compromise and backsliding, but when we are thoroughly grounded in scriptures it holds us fast together and in the truth.

The major danger of being excessively committed to the gathering together of saints is if one allows our collective fellowship to take the place of personal devotion. For this reason one has to be careful and not put overdue importance on Christian fellowship. You must have far more time for personal study of God's word than you do in fellowship. I recommend just one fellowship during the week of maximum of 2 hours and Sunday worship which should be short, concise, direct, solemn, spiritual, impactful, and powerful. If one is a worker it is good to also attend one extra meeting aimed at preparing one for

service. At least a retreat should be held once a year. However, this should not be done in a way that is meant to be merely long and time consuming as though it were the length of time that makes it impactful. But since a retreat should span a considerable amount of time it should be packed with spiritual activities rather than merely being slack and with just any content just to make up the time. Asides these Sunday service alone is enough. We must never think that the longer we are in church the more spiritual we get or the closer we draw to God. Personal time for devotion must be daily and with considerable amount of time asides family devotion. This personal time with God is far more important than fellowship if they're to be placed on a scale, but gathering together is very important and the neglecting of it can bring about a spiritual decay no matter how devoted one is to his or her personal devotion. Fellowship with other brethren is irreplaceable but must be given its right priority in terms of how often we gather.

So I see no reason why anyone would abandon all the immense benefits of joining the pilgrim band in a regular blessed fellowship. In all, "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24 - 25). May God help us to understand the solemn importance of our gathering together and grant us the grace to maintain a good, spiritual, and edifying gathering that shall spur us on on our heavenward journey, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you who said where two or three are gathered in your name, there you are in the midst of them. I pray that you give us the love to gather with one another in

your name as often as is expedient for our edification. And as we do so may we feel the blessedness of your presence. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 26: REMEMBER NAOMI

"I went out full and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi..."
(Ruth 1:21)

This is an article I wrote and I chose to insert into this book as it borders around the importance of fellowship. In it I sought to talk on what is the right response to the perversions we see in the church. It is very easy to conclude that we ought to leave the church as many people have been calling for well meaning Christians to leave the church. But to such people my only word of caution is, "remember Naomi."

There was famine in the land of Israel as there is famine of the word of God in today's church. Going with her husband and two sons, she left the land of Israel for the sake of famine as people today are being pressed to leave the church for the sake of famine of God's word. They thought it was the wisest thing to do just the way the people today think it's the wisest thing to do. However she went out full but came back empty. She went out in hope and came back with regrets. We have to be careful lest we come back empty in the later end with a lot of regrets.

Note her words, "...the LORD hath brought me home..." (Ruth 1:21). Home implies where she belongs. If you're born again, you belong to the church. The heretics you're leaving the church for don't belong there. History has taught us that these kinds of

actions are always a mistake. To leave your post to maintain peace because of a threat to peace would never maintain that peace. That David left the throne for Absalom didn't make him not to seek his life. Emperor Mauritius, the pious emperor of Byzantine, for the sake of peace left the throne for his rogue General and retired to his private monastery, but his General went after him, captured him, and beheaded his children while he watched, and thereafter killed him and threw their bodies into the sea. Those wicked enough to start a conflict of any kind, be it insurrection or other conflicts, will stop at nothing until they have accomplished their murderous intentions. Yielding won't stop it. And that is how it is with the Devil, he'll come at you anywhere you go. Leaving your post is never a way to seek for your edification and inner peace.

Also, to leave the church is to leave the field for the Devil. Wherever place you hope to find peace and green pasture, he'd bring the war there too. You can trust the Devil for that. Why not engage him in the field that is yours? Why not seek to take the field from him? Why not brandish the sword of the spirit and engage him right there?

The peace people are looking for in acting this way does not exist under the sun. Only in heaven can we have such peace where absolute truth reigns. To take our mind from such delusions, the Bible clearly states, "there must be also heresies among you..." (1 Corinthians 11:19). It is a must. Not long after some left the church because of heresies, as I've observed today, extortion, and wickedness, the Devil has sent heresies after them. Heresies such as "Christianity is not a religion," questioning the gender of God, whether or not hell and heaven is real, etc. So where's the peace? The Christian battle is not to be won by retreats but by head-on offensives. So let's be clear on that.

It is natural to want to separate yourself from an assembly that does not preach the true gospel or that use the gospel as a means for extortion. I too contemplated leaving the church for a long period of time and one day I concluded it was the right course of action to take. I decided to stay home and spend those hours praying, singing, and writing. However, as I was at home and wished to start my prayer with a song, the first song that came to my spirit was a Yoruba song. The translation in English goes thus:

"A shepherd of the sheep is our Saviour,
Our Father is at his post, what shall we fear,
Just let us go to where he leads us,
Whether it be to the arid land or to green pastures."

I meditated on this song a while. I wondered what message was in it for me at that present time. Then as I pondered on it, I began to receive the revelation that the church is the arid land. There's no food for the soul there it seems, but just let us go there since our Father is at his post, whether it is an arid land or a green pasture. Realising this I immediately dressed up and went to church. When I got there, it was service as usual. Music and messages that you know can't profit you a dime. But the Sunday after that a man who was not a pastor of that church was sent to preach. I know him very well and I didn't like his messages at all. And when he was introduced I had very little expectation of the message. But when he began to preach. Very surprisingly and very contrary to my expectation, his message sparked such a great revival in me and the entire congregation. He spoke about Moses, how he named his son Gershom (meaning sojourner), so as to keep himself in constant reminder that he was a stranger both in Egypt and in Moab. He took us

through scriptures and delivered such a powerful message to us never to forget that we are strangers in this world, and that to keep this in our mind is something we must labour to do as we are so prone to forget these things. He chided the worldly lifestyle in the church, not exempting himself, and made an altar call for everybody to come and pray for mercy to be ready when the Lord shall come to take us home. I was so blessed by the message and went home spiritually refreshed and fired up.

Now this was one of the men who preached the gospel of mammon. I have not heard him in particular preaching so much about money but I didn't like his messages all the same, and he was one of the guys running a sick church. Yet through him such a powerful message of revival came to my soul.

If God has abandoned his church a while, don't think he can't come back to breathe his life into the dry bones he left behind. Just as God revisited Israel as in the days of Naomi, he can by his own sovereign will and power choose to return with a sweeping revival. He could turn the hearts of these extortioners all the way back to himself in true and deep repentance. Why should you be left out when God returns to his church? I noticed one thing about that preacher in particular, from that time on all his messages were so powerful. Whatever it is that has clouded the eyes of our preachers, it is not a hard thing for God to take the veil off their faces with one snap of the finger. And had I followed the instinct of my heart, I'd have been left out at such moments of refreshing.

So let us not leave the church. Not leaving the church does not mean that you accept the things that are being done there or that you're a part of these things. But be there as a voice of righteousness and resist the powers there. In your respective

churches stand for the truth and push for a total unity in purity of the whole church. Don't stop at anything short of that.

I am confident that Christ is resolved on destroying the church system of today (not the church itself) as I explained in my article "THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST TO A BROTHER," and we can and ought to be his instrument to fulfilling that righteous purpose, but it can be done without leaving the church. It has to be done by challenging heresies head on. I expect to see better communication and questioning of false doctrine, and defending of the truth, either by letters, email messages, or by any means we see possible. Let us not fall for the deception of carving out one corner for ourselves for a peaceful and united fellowship. We must keep the battle raging in the field for the truth of our Lord and God, and not hide out in the bush somewhere singing hymns and clapping hands. Don't say "they are deceivers deceiving the deceived, leave them alone." Rather stand there with the sword of the spirit of God and drive them out.

When the Bible says, "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." (Revelation 18:4). This means we should strive to bring the church out of those sinful ways and not leave the church behind trying to come out of those sinful ways. Getting rid of the sinful ways is what's important, not leaving an assembly. We have not left the ways of Babylon if just a handful of people leave a church. It is when the sin of Babylon ceases in the church that we, his people, have "come out of her." This therefore should be our goal.

So let us remain in the church and keep praying for her and

doing all we can to have her come out of those sinful ways and be united in every way. If we have the courage, let us challenge even those in authority for their evil practices to their very faces. Let us hold the fort in midst of plenty or famine.

Naomi went out full, not just with possessions, family and all, she went full of hope, but she came back empty of everything including every hope. The actions of her family cost them much as they could not maintain a direct lineage to David. The great grandfather of David could have been her son, but Boaz came in his stead. Though Boaz raised seed for her son through Ruth, her family was not mentioned as part of the ancestors of David in any genealogical account of scriptures. They went through Boaz' lineage instead. Let us therefore be warned and not make such mistakes but remain steadfast for the truth without leaving our post.

May God help us and grant us help and guidance in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dearest Lord Jesus, I pray to you today asking for your help and guidance in knowing the best response to the evil that has crept into your church in these sad times. Give us grace to be courageous, bold, and unrelenting in our contention for the faith. Help is dear Lord. This I ask in your matchless name. Amen.

CHAPTER 27: SOLITUDE WITH GOD

"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone."
(Matthew 14:23)

Now we come to another level of our intimacy with God. In our intimacy with God we have discussed about things to depart from. The first is to depart from sin. This, being the first and greatest thing to depart from, requires that we put a gulf in between us and it. The next is to depart from the world. Now, not only must we withdraw from these things alone but we must also find time to withdraw from everything else, whether family, friends, and yes, even the pilgrim band. No, don't get me wrong. I don't mean withdrawing from them to do what they won't like, like hiding away to smoke weed. No! I mean withdrawing from all things else to fellowship with God alone on a one on one basis. You with him, heart to heart, spirit to spirit. This I refer to as solitude with God. To this agrees Richard Baxter who wrote, "I give not this advice for occasional meditation, but for that which is set and solemn. Therefore withdraw thyself from all society, even the society of godly men, that thou mayest awhile enjoy the society of thy Lord."

Solitude with God is not to be mistaken for isolation. It is rather fellowshiping with God on a personal basis. A fellowship that anything else coming in between would be a distraction and a

joy spoiler. The fellowship with other Christians is important, but even the richness of that fellowship is totally dependent on the quality of time each individual member of such fellowship spends with God personally. I myself fixed particular importance to gatherings and spiritual activities but over time I began to see that the richness of my experience of God were far more intense in solitude with him. With time I saw the need to be more withdrawn to a personal devotion with God than to be ever busy in Christian gatherings. I believe this came as a result of spiritual growth. Too much of this group religion, too much of this flocking about practice of many modern day Christians. To know what is popular, we move with the crowd. God is often not in the crowd. To see God, you must know him and in withdrawal experience solitude with God.

Lamenting how people are so encumbered with public fellowship to the detriment of their own personal devotion with God, Richard Baxter wrote, “O the cursed madness of many that seem to be religious! They thrust themselves into a multitude of employments, till they are loaded with labors, and clogged with cares, that their souls are as unfit to converse with God, as a man to walk with a mountain on his back; and as unapt to soar in meditation, as their bodies to leap above the sun! And when they have lost that heaven upon earth, which they might have had, they take up with a few rotten arguments to prove it lawful: though, indeed, they cannot.” I myself have seen people with this kind of "cursed madness that seem to be religious." You'd hear people say things like, "I can't miss house fellowship for anything," yet will never worship on their own. They'd be ever running not to be late for prayer meetings in church, but they'll hardly pray on their own.

You see, this kind of being busy in religious activity without

being concerned for our relationship to the one we claim to serve could be born of nothing but the love of praise from men. People like the "cursed madness" of religiosity because of what people would or could say about them in their service to God. But Jesus doesn't like that spirit. He said, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). Christ wants us to seek the honour that comes from God alone. However, these hyper religious people don't care much about drawing close to God personally and building their lives in his ways that shall attract his praise alone, but they're so busy in activities that shall bring praise to them from others. From Jesus' statement, "how can ye believe..." we know that this "cursed madness" works against our faith with God and our walk with him even though it seems to be in the service of him.

A.W. Tozer said, and I agree, that he supposes that the length of time one prays in public is inversely proportional to the time he prays when alone. How true. All these guys running about in their religiosity can pray or endure excessively long prayers, not because they're spiritual, but because they're empty within. The man that is empty within needs the lengthy prayer before being able to be convinced with a false conviction that his prayers have now been answered. The man who's full of God's presence within knows that even the shortest prayers expressed in his thoughts are heard by God and have been answered because he feels the presence of God always. And having spent quality time with God in private is ever conscious of that manifest presence of God about him and within him. To this agrees Richard Baxter when he wrote, “Christians, who are much in secret prayer and contemplation, are men of the greatest life and joy; because they have all more immediately from God himself.” Such a person need not pray long in public because that joy of assurance deep

within them is overflowing. Christ could spend all night in private prayer, but even at Lazarus' grave when he raised him from the dead, he only spoke about three sentences. The empty man just pours out lengthy words and in the end supposes within himself, "I suppose he must have heard something of all that I've said now." So religiosity can be the outward expression of inward spiritual bankruptcy contrary to what it seems like. Let not the religious man or the observer of the religious man think that his religiosity is of necessity a mark of spiritual devotion. It may as well be a mark of "cursed madness."

The Bible says, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love." (Ephesians 3:17). By this we know that Christ dwells in our hearts if we abide in him by faith. Just as Christ is wherever two or more are gathered together in his name (Matthew 18:20), the heart too is a dwelling place for Christ. We could say he pays a passing visit to where two or three are gathered in his name, but he dwells in the heart. Therefore, to experience him richly, we must retreat from that which is external into the inner chambers of the heart, and there shall we find him and talk to him and have him teach us his mysteries. Not through the mouth of another, but by his own self, as Alfred H. Vine wrote:

"O strangely art Thou with us, Lord,
Neither in height nor depth to seek:
In nearness shall Thy voice be heard;
Spirit to spirit Thou dost speak."

À Kempis Thomas wrote, "Seek a secret place for thyself, love to dwell alone with thyself, desire the conversation of no one; but rather pour out thy devout prayer to God, that thou mayest possess a contrite mind and a pure conscience. Count the whole

world as nought; seek to be alone with God before all outward things.” To be withdrawn from the world is a necessity if one must live a good Christian life. A lot of offences go unnoticed and thus unrepented of in the hustle and bustle of worldly affairs. But when withdrawn, in solitude with God, we can then listen quietly to the voice of our conscience as we examine our ways, thoughts, and motives. It is then we can truly pray to God with a contrite heart, make amends, refocus our attention on eternal things, among a host of other things of immense spiritual benefits.

Apart from the fact that being withdrawn in solitude with God helps us to examine ourselves properly, make amends, and reawaken our zeal for the things above, being withdrawn also helps keep us from unnecessary offences. When we are in the midst of people we are far more likely both to offend God and others, as well as to be offended ourselves by others. It is my prayer that through the inward working of the Holy Ghost offences won't come from you, but not every man has that Holy Ghost dwelling within them and some people lack manners, while others are just godless and their godlessness is sure to cause you grief, that is if you be godly yourself. Would you then expose yourself to the risk of being offended by such people except it be absolutely necessary to encounter them? I guess it is for this reason someone said, according to À Kempis Thomas, "As oft as I have gone among men, so oft have I returned less a man.” I too feel this way often. I work from home at the moment, which makes me free from having to interact often with others, but whenever I go out, very often I come back heavy. Not just do I feel heavy, I realise that when at home all the time my thoughts are purer with far less need to wrestle with bad thoughts to keep it pure, but when I have to go out often, my thoughts are harder to keep pure. So it is easier to be

holy in thought and consequently in act when one is in isolation.

I like the approach puritans have towards their gatherings who were said to hold really short gatherings that were principally aimed at spurring members to continue in fervent personal devotion to God. This is bound to yield great spiritual fruit and the gathering is bound to be very edifying. Our gathering together can only be as fervent as each member that plays a part is fervent in private. If each member has a rich time of personal devotion to God, when they come together they'll experience a reviving manifestation of the presence of God. But when each member spends all their time at home watching silly soap operas and movies, catching fun everywhere, jesting and other unwise ways of spending one's time, their time together will be very useless. This accounts for why entertainment is rife in today's church. Mind you the church was not this way some say ten to twenty years ago. I'm confident the church slipped into this way because members didn't have a rich time with God in private and thought merely spending time together in the name of gathering should suffice. So entertainment, excitement, and amusement became the order of the day because members were given to this kind of private life.

When members are spiritual individually, the church will grow spiritually. When they don't have time for God and their spiritual life decay the church shall slip into spiritual and moral decay. You must then need entertainment, dramas with cinematic effects, music in secular concert style, etc. to prop your members up and to keep them coming to church. So we see that our gathering together has its place in our heavenward journey and so does our private devotion to God. The effectiveness of our gathering is reliant on our personal devotion to God.

The man who shall be counted worthy of the kingdom of God is the man that has root in himself (Mark 4:17). A good Christian must have root in himself, not his church having root in him. He must build a conviction upon the Bible in himself because fellowship with God is essentially personal. Our gathering together makes it richer but our fellowship is still with the Father on an essentially personal basis. Without thoroughly knowing God by yourself and understanding the Gospel personally, you'd be like the unfruitful seed fit for destruction. All these people who keep saying "pastor said..." rather than reason for themselves based on what they read in scripture for themselves in personal devotion fall in this category. I feel sorry that there are women in this category who would rather obey their pastor than their husbands.

Furthermore, while a get-together of friends, colleagues, comrades, etc. is sweet, a conversation is often sweeter and more intimate when two people are engaged in it alone. It is a totally different story when even a third person is involved. Nothing sweeter than one on one conversation. It is the same with conversing with God. Fellowship is good and shouldn't be done without, but solitude with God is better. So the two are complementary and one should not go without the other.

Apart from that, the moment a third person gets involved in a conversation it becomes less intimate and likely to be less honest and sincere. Have you seen all these posts people post about their spouses or family on social media? Something like, "happy birthday to the loveliest woman on earth." Or "had an awesome day with the most amazing man the mind could conceive." And all that public praise. Or maybe not even a word of praise, but just an amazing family photo with every member smiling wide as if from east to west. Yeah. It is lovely to behold but do you

know such words and photos are not always sincere in what they portray? Sometimes the spouses singing their praises on the social media may not feel as lucky as they try to sound in public, but they have to sound that way anyways. Why? Because it is public. These same people may not sound these sweet in their private family conversations. Even when they call each other sweet names like, "honey" it'll be with a tone of irritation. Yet in public they have an image of the best couples.

So it is not everything that is pronounced in public that is sincere. As a wife or a husband, it is that which you say to your husband or wife in private that is truly sincere. When you tell your spouse in private how much he or she means to you, how beautiful they are, how much they're cherished and how much you love them, that is when it can be truly sincere. It is the same with God. It is good to join in Sunday worship songs declaring your love for God, it is good to shut your eyes tight, raise your hands, and shed a tear or two as you declare your love to him along with the other brethren. But you know many things can drive us into such an outward show of love that may not necessarily be what we feel in our declaration about God. It may be the pastor chanting and trying to spur us on, it may be the fact that everyone else is doing it and we shouldn't be the odd one out, it may be because daddy and mummy are just over there and you need to let them know that the conversion experience you said you had is really genuine. It could be any of these, but it doesn't have to. Our hearts are deceptive and we may never even know if these things are responsible for our outward demonstrations or not. To clear our doubt and to be certain our hearts aren't deceiving us, we must compare what we declare in public to what we declare in private. But what if we don't have a private devotion with which to compare our public praise with? That will be the worst case scenario by which we

know we are just merely being hypocritical. But even if we do have a quiet time in private with God, and we appear to be more dull in our declaration of love towards God in private than in public, it is a sure sign that we are being insincere. While open publicly declaring our love for God is good, even if it is not absolutely sincere, it is that which we declare to God in our closet, after shutting our doors, and speaking to him one on one, telling him how much we love him, what he means to us and so on that is truly sincere.

One of the hymns of Isaac Watts (1674–1748) goes:

"God is a Spirit, just and wise
He sees our inmost mind;
In vain to Heav'n we raise our cries,
And leave our souls behind.

Nothing but truth before His throne
With honor can appear;
The painted hypocrites are known
Through the disguise they wear.

Their lifted eyes salute the skies,
Their bended knees the ground;
But God abhors the sacrifice
Where not the heart is found.

Lord, search my thoughts, and try my ways,
And make my soul sincere;
Then shall I stand before Thy face,
And find acceptance there."

The heart is deceitful and even those who do these things may

themselves be deceived that they're truly offering to God acceptable sacrifices. The only way to be sure we are sincere is by examining ourselves in our personal quiet time with him.

This is one of the reasons God wants us to have that personal intimacy and to be in solitude with him. That is why Jesus teaches to pray to our heavenly Father which "seeth in secret." Christ says in Matthew 6:6 says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." He knows that the secret prayer is the sincere prayer. The one the Pharisees prayed at the corners of the streets he didn't like. He called it hypocrisy. He didn't like that type of prayer. But he wants the prayer of solitude. That is the sweetest one, that is the sincerest one. God wouldn't settle for less than a sincere and intimate relationship with us.

We should also mark those words "your father which is in secret." God is in secret and to find him most intimately we must be withdrawn from the world to a secret life of solitude with him. À Kempis Thomas wrote, “The nearer a man approacheth to God, the further he recedeth from all earthly solace.” This because of the sweetness of God's presence is in a way addictive. I once saw an advert for a game and on it was written something like, "WARNING! Your friends and loved ones will see less of you." They were trying to say the game is that sweet. Never played it to find out, but the sweetness of intimacy with God is much sweeter that it has the natural effect of making us recede from all earthly solace and company, for they're inferior to what his presence has to offer.

We are often influenced by our societies and immediate

surroundings. Many choose where to live, being cautious of the kind of company their children would keep if they grew up in the neighbourhood of their desired residence. Some would sacrifice huge sums of money to live in a very developed part of town just because they want their children to associate themselves with civility. They know that is an easy way to raise civil children. We too, when we are ever in consistent solitude with God, the heavenly society of angels influences us and their holiness and purity of life robs off on us. This is an easy way to be pure and holy. For an assurance of this, it is written in Leviticus 10:3, "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." Purity comes by our intimacy with God. In coming near to God, he shall be sanctified in us. We shall surely find ourselves different from the rest of the world as a result of this and as a matter of fact, the rest of the church, but it is better that way. It is then that we shall be truly holy with that mystifying holiness.

In agreement with this, Richard Baxter wrote, "Intercourse with God will keep men low, and that lowliness will promote their intercourse." Our solitude with God will make us humble as God is humble. And this same humility is essential to drive us nearer still to God in intimacy.

As a way of rounding off this chapter and as a form of reminder, let us revisit Jesus' words again. He says, "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." (Matthew 13:20 - 21). In that Christ says "in

himself..." It refers to having deep personal conviction and devotion to God. Not the conviction that comes from other members in a fellowship. Those whose faith is anchored on fellowship can't be as strong as they ought to be. They'll wither away. They who are holding on to one fellowship, personality, etc. or the other and seem to be standing are only enduring for a while. When tribulations or persecutions come, they'll fall away. If we must make it home we must cultivate a personal and intimate relationship with God. In personal prayer and in the private study of his word, we shall have root in ourselves. Let us therefore develop a life style of solitude with God. May God help us all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father who is in secret and seeth in secret, teach us to avoid the cursed madness of engaging in religious activities while being spiritually bankrupt. Help us to imbibe the practice of being in solitude with you and so doing may experience your abiding presence richly. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 28: DETACHMENT AND MONASTICISM

"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone."
(Matthew 14:23)

"And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."
(Mark 6:31)

"And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them."
(Mark 9:2)

Now, we come to another aspect of intimacy with God. It is called detachment and monasticism. What do I mean by these? It means a way of life that has semblance with or suggestive of a monkish lifestyle. When I talk about monasticism, I mean something that is almost the same as solitude with God, but this goes beyond what should be done to what is merely an ideal. An ideal we aspire to but don't have to live by. We don't have to live as monks, but should take from their way of life and live as closely to it as possible. Their lives are a good ideal to have as

a Christian, except for the vows. That is because our yes should be our yes and that anything more than this is of evil (Matthew 5:34-37). So we needn't take vows to be devoted to God. It is just a matter of will and choice and living by it, so no vow is required.

This therefore has to do with the understanding that we own nothing. That is detachment. We had seen in the introductory section of this book that we are sojourners together with God. And seeing that we are sojourners, it means this world is not our own and we don't really own anything in here. Not even this body is ours. And seeing that we don't own them we ought to be detached from them. Our life ought to be free from them. We use them but are not connected to them. This mindset would help us a lot in many areas of life. We can easily become contented in life when we know that we own nothing. We would be satisfied provided we have enough for our basic needs. Greedy men bask in the deluded euphoria of owning and so can't be contented.

Knowing we own nothing also gives us the full consciousness that we can lose nothing. We would therefore be bold and courageous in life when we realise we can lose nothing. Those who live cowardly lives are those who are too attached to this ephemeral life. In my book on the life of Joab I pointed out that Joab and his siblings were most likely illegitimate children from various pieces of evidence in the Bible. I also explained how that being illegitimate children in the land of Israel they were about the most disadvantaged people on the planet. They could own nothing by inheritance and since all the things of substance that were owned in Israel were gotten by inheritance and lands were not sold, if at all they were sold it was never permanently, for this reason they couldn't own any property and must labour from

nothing for whatever wealth they were to possess. Their unfortunate state which they were put into by the foolishness of their parents put all the illegitimate children of Israel in a state where they could easily come to the realisation that they owned nothing in this world. And what was the result of this? The illegitimate children in Israel were about the most valiant men in battle. The three sons of Zeruiah were all mighty men in David's army. Men of uncommon exploits. Jephtah too was an illegitimate child and he too was valiant in battle. Abimelech too was an illegitimate child and he too was a valiant man. So this was the one trait of the illegitimate children of the land of Israel. What made them valiant? They were valiant because they were put in a condition where they could own close to little or nothing, and this gave them the consciousness that they could lose little or nothing. And being this way they couldn't feel any form of attachment to the things of this world. Even if they possessed wealth, they couldn't possess things of substance such as land or property. And so engaging in warfare at risk of losing their lives meant little or nothing to them.

We too must always remind ourselves that, though not for a cursed reason like the illegitimate children of Israel, we too own nothing in this world. Ours is for a blessed reason like the blessedness of the Levitical priests of whom God said, "Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel." (Numbers 18:20). Realising this, we must be detached from the things of the world. We use the things of the world without feeling attached to it.

It is but natural to feel attached to whatever thing is of benefit or things that provide pleasure that comes to us by our earning it or by privilege, and God acknowledges this as a legitimate

desire. Concerning how the children of Israel should go to war and before they go out God commands thus, "And the officers shall speak unto the people, saying, What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man dedicate it. And what man is he that hath planted a vineyard, and hath not yet eaten of it? let him also go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man eat of it. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her." (Deuteronomy 20:5 - 7). We see that even to God the possessing of these good things is a good justification not to go to war. So not willing to die on account of possessing these things and other things of value is not a sinful desire for God acknowledges its legitimacy. However the inordinate attachment to these things is both sinful and causes us to be cowardly, fearful, and unproductive. Sinful because it is so akin to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. And it makes us unproductive because cowardice paralyses.

While the courage of the illegitimate children of the children of Israel is not emulate-able or recommendable for they possess this courage on the grounds of being bastards, yet their lives teach us a salient lesson that he who must serve God and live life well and rightly must be courageous. And this also informs us that attachment to the things of this world promotes cowardice.

Now cowardice is a great fault and sin. It is written, "But the fearful... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8). So this one sense of detachment from the things of this world would put a lot of things in order that were out of order in our

lives and heal us of a lot of diseases of the heart and soul. It shall save us from the lake of fire. Our heavenward gaze shall be clearer and purer.

So this is not just detachment from people but from the world entirely, refusing to own anything, and focusing on heaven. It is written in Colossians 3:1, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Being detached from the world is essential for us to experience the best of God's intimacy.

A monk does not marry, raise children, and has his whole time devoted to God. This is the major reason why I said it is an ideal that we mustn't abide by but we must aspire to. I had written in my book, "THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME," that living the life of a celibate is better and must be considered first before making up our minds to marry. This is what I mean; when people are growing up, all the thoughts of their mind is "when I'm through with school, I'll get a job, get a decent income, and get married." I believe many who have the gift of celibacy have gotten married because they never gave it a thought. I believe that if the church must get the best from the Christians who comprise the church we must reawaken the consciousness that the best and ideal life is a life of celibacy. And so let each man give it a thought first and only choose to marry when he sees that it is expedient for him to marry.

The Bible tells us plainly, "But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord,

that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." (1 Corinthians 7:32 - 35). So the single ones are able to focus on God and care little for the things of this world without harm, but the married ones can't do it as well.

Seeing that we are strangers and sojourners with God, the ideal life to live is therefore a life of celibacy. The whole world together with what you think you have or can possess will pass away. Then why bother about these things? Despite the fact that we ought not to bother ourselves about this things, the married man and woman must be bothered. To fail to provide for the things which one's house requires makes him worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8). So he must be bothered and run the heavenly race with a divided attention. He must be attached to some degree. He must entertain some feeling of cowardice for a man without a family has almost no reason to be afraid of misfortune or of dying. And what does Christ say about the worries of this life? He says, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matthew 13:22). The worries of this life brought to us by having a family is able, if we aren't careful, to make us unfruitful.

Now, I don't mean that just anyone or anything called a monk in history or at present should be emulated, but I refer to good monks who practiced an ascetic life. À Kempis Thomas, for example, is a great monk and his book, "The Imitations Of Christ" is a good book that informs us of what brilliance could

come from a monastic life. Another is Thomas Aquinas whose writings are still studied today even in secular philosophy. Richard of St. Victor who wrote the treatise titled Benjamin which we've made reference to about the opening of this book. St. Francis of Assisi whose life and sacrifices eventually birthed our beloved King James Bible was also a monk. The list goes on and we won't be outrageously wrong to say the apostle Paul was a monk too.

Lord Francis Bacon wrote, "the monastical life is not simple contemplative, but performeth the duty either of incessant prayers and supplications, which hath been truly esteemed as an office in the Church, or else of writing or taking instructions for writing concerning the law of God, as Moses did when he abode so long in the mount." Here Lord Francis Bacon rightly presents monasticism as an office of the church. That office has completely died off, not by its obsoleteness or uselessness, but because somehow men forgot its usefulness. Seeing it is still useful and rightly called an office in the church, it has to be revived, by forcing people into it, or creating an actual office for it, but let those who can live their lives as celibates for the benefit of the church and the kingdom of God. He also presented Moses' long isolation on the mount as a form of monasticism. What a great thinker and philosopher he is.

Living a monastic life frees us from worldly concerns. It is a life of isolated devotion to God. Not isolation done to hide away from the strife of the world to seek a life of ease in a hamlet, but an isolation that is a form of sacrificing the world for the sake of God. Such isolation is not a permanent isolation from the world in which you have no interaction with other men. Men like St. Francis of Assisi went from place to place teaching men. And so was the way of other monks too. But they don't associate

themselves so much with the things of the world.

William Henry Beckett wrote in his book, "The English Reformation Of The Sixteenth Century," “THE history of monasticism in this country [England] is that of successive attempts at reform and of successive failure. Attractive to the imagination as a life of self-denial in retirement from the world for the culture of the spiritual life is to many, the experience of centuries has shown it to be an illusion. Service in the world, not selfish seclusion from its needs, sorrows, temptations, and business, is the true doctrine of the cross of Christ.” Monasticism that is all about selfish isolation to hide away from the troubles of the world is always bound to fail. I've read of how some seeking such a life ended up becoming monsters, even eating other humans and engaging in robbery. This happened to them because of their isolation, losing touch with humanity, and running into dire want of sustenance. So we must be wary that true monasticism is not confused for mere selfish isolation from the world.

When one is in isolation there is a high tendency to slip into idleness which is a terrible thing. The reason God destroyed Sodom was not even because of their barbaric acts as such, it was because of their abundance of idleness (Ezekiel 16:49). With idleness comes abundance of evil and gross wickedness, and so Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed in one day. For this reason, in the monastical years of Christianity, much caution was taken against idleness which proved very effective in ensuring that the practice did not turn into a vice. William Henry Beckett went on to write, “Idleness, wrote the great monastic legislator of Western monachism, 'is an enemy of the soul.'” How true. In trying to form rules to avoid the hazards of isolation, such rules had to be made that idleness must be avoided at all cost. I

wrote against idleness in particular in my book titled, "THE LIFE OF JOAB."

This caution and approach helped produce some of the finest minds in Christian history. All the monks mentioned above were monks who followed this rule strictly and ensured that they didn't allow themselves to slip into idleness. Writing our beloved À Kempis Thomas, Hezekiah Butterworth, in his book titled "The Story of the Hymns and Tunes," wrote, "His monastic life—as was true generally of the monastic life of the middle ages—was not one of useless idleness. The Brethren taught school and did mechanical work." This way, they nurtured the brilliant minds they had and did works that have been a huge treasure to the Christian faith down the ages.

I suppose the monastical life is the type of life many religious orders try to imitate but they only do so amiss. The modern day pastor thinks he shouldn't work and live on the so-called tithes and offerings of his members. This, they claim, is so that he can have time for the things of God. They want to have time for the things of God but they choose to marry and then let go of working. They should have worked and let go of marriage to give themselves time for God's work. But a man who's not a husband of one wife ought not to be a deacon or a bishop. This I say pertaining to those who say their bishops and other church leaders shouldn't marry.

The Roman Catholics try to emulate this order too in forcing their priests not to marry. And in addition to that they don't work either. So it is also amiss. The monks who have served the church most profitably all worked. And by this choice of not being legally married their priests make themselves unfit for the position they're occupying, that is if there be any office of

Popish priesthood in the church in the first place. The monks abstained from marriage, didn't hold any post in the church, but served God independently moving from place to place. So the monk's way of life is not an example for church leadership of any kind

So what does this all mean? First it means that as many that can should live as celibates to enable them focus on serving God without distractions. A single person can live well without any property. For his food he could work like washing dishes in a restaurant, cleaning, and other things and they'd give him food on a steady basis. For shelter, if he can just device a means to keep warm and keep insects away he can sleep anywhere like a baby. That was how St. Francis of Assisi and his friars lived. That is without owning any property. This is the worst case for a single man and yet the freedom of time and freedom from care it gives is enviable.

But not everybody has this gift. To those who don't have the gift, to be so sacrificial in service to God would amount to a sin. One needs to be devoted to securing a good livelihood for his home. The married also can't be so detached from the world. They must seek to own some things that shall serve as a security to their family well-being and also seek to own what they shall leave as an inheritance to their young whom they've brought into the world. The Bible says, "... the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." (2 Corinthians 12:14). It is also written, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children..." (Proverbs 13:22). So as many as bring children into the world owe them this responsibility. It takes a bad man to give birth and not seek to leave inheritance to his children. So the married can't be so detached from this world. It is wickedness to seek to do so.

They must earn a living to secure the welfare of their children while they're alive and when they leave the world.

While as many as choose to marry and bear the responsibility of a family, through the necessities of life, are ever distracted in their devotion to God, they must ensure that as much as possible, they have time to be alone with God. They must have quality time with God daily and where possible have days of absolute devotion to God, say once a year, in which they can take like five days at a stretch to be alone with God in contemplation and prayer. A good time for this would be during the yuletide or other holiday period when one could have a good amount of days off from work. They must also seek to be detached from the world as much as they can afford and must not use the excuse of family cares to be so engrossed in the pursuit of possessing wealth. Parents must remember that the care of their families is in the hand of God. However, they must always ensure to prioritise spending time with family to teach their own children themselves, for proper godly parenting should be the foremost priority of Christian parents in things pertaining to this ephemeral life.

My advice though is this, do not isolate beyond the time when you feel you've spent enough time alone with God. The moment you realise you're no more praying, reading your Bible, writing, meditating, but that you're just idle with your mind wandering here and there, it is a sign it is time to return to the hustle and bustle of life.

Prayer: Dear Lord and God, you who have declared yourself to be a sojourner with us. Teach us to hold and maintain this sojourner status ourselves, and having maintained it to hold on to it in detachment from the things of this world. Give us a

more pure and perfect wisdom in respect of these things. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 29
SILENCE AND STILLNESS

"But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."
(Habakkuk 2:20)

"Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."
(Psalm 46:10)

Now we come to the last aspect of our intimacy with God. Silence and stillness. When we come into the presence of God, as in our personal quiet time, our words should be few and we should be more eager to listen to him and get instructions. Even in our prayers we ought to make it a practice to be silent and hear him speak at intervals. In the presence of God, we ought to be still and quiet.

King Solomon wrote, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." (Ecclesiastes 5:2). When you behold his almightiness and your smallness, wisdom demands that you be silent in his presence.

God commands us to keep silence and be still before him. It is written, "Be still, and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10). Dr. Selwyn Hughes explains this verse to mean that we need to be silent in contemplation. We may think that the hardest things to

do are actions, but we shall find it surprising how hard inaction is when we try to be silent in his presence.

It is also written, "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." (Habakkuk 2:20). So, apart from it aiding us in hearing him speak to us, it's an act of deep reverence towards God to be still and to keep silence before him. And if we must speak it must be in humble supplications.

A. B. Simpson wrote, “... if we desire to be kept, we must maintain a quiet spirit, free from the turmoil and agitation of anxious care and inward strife, and still enough to always hear His voice... Our imaginations, our thoughts must be suppressed until we learn to wait in stillness for God's voice and God's thoughts.” God's voice speaks to us more audibly when we are silent both with our mouths and in our thoughts. There is much danger in not being silent before God. If our thoughts are hard to keep still and silent, we may as well confuse our thoughts for his words. This would spell disaster especially if we needed to hear from him for guidance.

A.W. Tozer once cautioned the Christians of his time saying "our religious activities should be ordered in such a way as to leave plenty of time for the cultivation of the fruits of solitude and silence." If this true admonition was given to the church concerning religious activities, how much more, as individuals, ought we to order our worldly activities in such a way as to leave plenty of time for the cultivation of the fruits of solitude and silence. As we have said before, the very religious activities can be a "cursed madness" and which activities, because it denies us of the ability to be silent, still and alone with God, can deprive us of a healthy spiritual growth and work against it.

Rest can only be found in our solitude and stillness with God. "For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill." (Isaiah 30:15 - 17). When men refuse to return to God, and are instead bothering themselves about much activities here and there, destruction shall come after them. God promises here that in quietness and confidence shall we find strength, but as said before, how strangely hard it is to keep still, be at rest, and be quiet. It is so easy to be jumpy and boisterous about outward things that can be mistaken for devotion, but to be still and quiet is awfully hard. And seeing this is the will of God, even our stillness and quietness, God promises those who differ so as to choose boisterous actions in which they of their own self feel would profit them, he promises them miserable and complete destruction. In the quiet of our solitude with God shall we find strength to win any of life's battles. May we not find destruction in the gullibility of flying about in boisterous religious activity when we should be cultivating a quiet personal devotion.

We must therefore practice the art of keeping still and silent if we want to experience God more. This explains to us the further importance of detachment and monasticism. Every sound, every sight, every smell, every worldly thought, and whatsoever else stimulates our senses can be a source of great distraction. For this reason we need to pray in secret and silence (as much as possible) to experience the riches of God's presence and intimacy. While in the bustle of family, companions and servants, Jacob

didn't experience much of God. But he did in his moments of isolation, when he was left alone. First he experienced God when he was alone and going to Laban, his mother's brother (Genesis 28:16), and when he was left alone when he was about to encounter Esau his brother (Genesis 32:24). While the Christian man must tune his heart to God at all times in prayer, we must know that God can especially be found in our private place of prayer.

There are many rewards of keeping silent before God, but we find one major reward of this practice in Isaiah 41:1 which says, "Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment." When we are silent before God we shall find our inner strength renewed by the strength which his Holy Spirit imbues. When we have been so strengthened, we can then speak in the strength that originates from him, the Almighty. Such strength is essential for living a victorious Christian life and in effective Christian service, both to God and to humanity.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Father, teach us the art of silence and stillness before you, and having known it grant us the strength to be still and quiet in your presence. And in doing this may we experience you richly, find uncommon strength for a victorious Christian life and service to you and humanity. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 30: SECTIONAL CONCLUSION

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."
(2 Corinthians 13:11)

We have come to the end of this section. We must learn to deliberately sink ourselves deeper and deeper into the depths of intimacy with God. Don't love the world. Rather come out of it and the lusts thereof. We mustn't be overly religious so much that we don't have a quality quiet time with God. And we, as much as possible, should withdraw from the world to spend time alone with God. Without intimacy with God, our love may as well grow stale.

During the COVID lockdown it was alleged that some homes were broken. The explanation some gave for that is because spouses suddenly had to spend whole days with themselves and that was when cracks began to be so big that the home got broken. I began to wonder, how can these things be? How can spending too much time with a spouse end up in a divorce? I thought that spending more time with the object of your love without having the necessity to rush out to work would be a bliss. A second honeymoon if any in our days ever had a first honeymoon. You could talk the whole day about things you never could before. You could cook together, play together, sing together, dance together, and everything together. But it is this

same abundance of time together that should have been blissful that broke the marriage. My conclusion is, many, though they be married, don't love themselves. They've only tolerated themselves thus far because their jobs kept them away from each other. So they always had a place to escape to in order to avoid the nasty company of the person they call "spouse." When there was no job, the centre could no longer hold, and things fell apart.

It is true that just as the love between spouses could grow stale, so much that they won't be able, even if they try, to spend time together, our love for God too can grow stale. But that is if we don't cultivate intimacy with him as discussed in this section. With more intimacy comes more freshness in the love we have for him.

May God help us to be more and more intimate with him in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for bringing me to the conclusion of this section. I see how very important intimacy with you is to my heavenward journey. Help me to keep the things I've read in this section in mind and practice them. Drive me deeper and deeper into an intimate devotion to you. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

SECTIONAL HYMN

CLOSER, STILL CLOSER

By L. R. Clark , in The Brilliant

Closer, still closer, my Savior, to Thee,
Closer to Jesus now fain would I be;
Round me His arm, on His bosom my head;
Near the dear side which on Calvary bled.

Chorus:
Closer to Thee, still closer to Thee,
Dear Savior, I want to be closer to Thee.

Closer by day, tho' my sky be all bright;
Closer, still closer when falleth the night;
Earth hath no brightness away from His face;
Time has no moment I need not His grace.

Chorus

When to the Jordan of death I descend,
Danger I'll fear not if Christ be my friend;
Breasting the billows, my death song shall be,
Closer, still closer, my Savior to Thee.

Chorus

Closer to Jesus, I'm nearer to God;
Nearer the home of the Christian's abode;
Nearer the great and the glorious Three,
Nearer to Heaven when closer to Thee.

Chorus

SECTION 5:

PENITENTIAL STRIDES

CHAPTER 31: KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S HOLINESS

"This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house."
(Ezekiel 43:12)

He who loves indeed seeks to know more about the one he loves. I'm not now talking of vain infatuations, or other petty feelings. Loving someone also makes you to desire to spend more time with them, talk to them, and do things with them. People with such feelings only stay apart from one another when necessity compels them to. The same way it is when we love God. We desire to know more about him, spend time with him, and talk with him provided we believe that he hears us.

When we begin to spend time with him, we begin to realise many things about him, especially his holiness and perfectness. Very pronounced amongst the things the Bible echoes about God is his holiness. We see other things like how he's perfect in knowledge, in wisdom, in power, etc. However holiness according to the dictionary means perfect in righteousness, goodness, and judgment, but it goes beyond to include the things we've spoken about in a previous section.

Ezekiel 43:12 presents a picture very similar to when God

revealed himself to the children of Israel at mount Sinai. All around the Lord is holy and he who beholds can't help but see how holy he is. To spend time with him therefore shall expose us more and more to this fact.

It is written, "Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:15 - 16). God is holy beyond what we can fathom. The peak of the righteousness we can conceive in our minds is as an abomination before him for his purity.

It is also written in Habakkuk 1:13, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil..." We can't relate with him in prayer and study of the word without being very conscious of these attributes of his.

So, as we draw close to God, we inevitably begin to see his holiness and perfection. And this is just one side of it. There is the painful reality we begin to realise also when we draw close to him.

The Effect Of The Knowledge Of The Holiness Of God

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims... And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory... Then said I, Woe is me! for I

am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."
(Isaiah 6:1 - 5)

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."
(Luke 5:8)

I remember when I was young, I watched a very interesting and popular cartoon called Tarzan. The little boy being human grew up amidst monkeys. When he got of age to notice the difference between himself and the monkeys he wondered why he was different. He was of a fair complexion and the monkeys were like dark mud. So he took mud and put it on his face but it wouldn't stick. Despite relating with the monkeys he knew immediately that something was different about him. The same way Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, in his autobiography, said that when he was taken from Africa and sold off to white men he wondered why the difference existed between him and them. He said he washed his face as hard as he could if perhaps he could become white like them. That of course was to no avail.

These two characters tell us of what must happen when we love we come to God, draw close to him in intimacy and get to see him as he is by means of his revelation. When we love God and begin to seek to understand him, immediately we begin to notice and observe the difference between us and God. If Olaudah Equiano didn't really see much in his being black while all around him were blacks, but finding himself amongst white men why he was black became to him a thing of particular interest. An interest that made him seek to understand a thing about

himself he never cared to know before. So also if we have lived our lives as we wanted amidst an evil and corrupt world, and what we were not being so glaring being among the sinful race of men wasn't of any particular interest to us, when we begin to love the holy God and come to him, we more and more begin to discover our sinful state. That sinful nature of ours begins naturally to become a thing of particular concern to us. That is the painful realisation we begin to make when we draw close to God.

The prophet, when he saw the revelation of God's glory he was overwhelmed. He had seen God in his temple high and exalted and saw the seraphims worship him. The one particular thing that was first said was, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts..." His majestic holiness was proclaimed and is about the foremost thing we can realise about God when we behold his majesty. His glory, his power, and everything about him is in holiness. In the presence of the Holy One the prophet could help but cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5). He of course was aware that he was a sinful man in a sinful world before now, but it was at this point he could cry "woe is me!" And why the woe? He said, "for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." When we see the King in his majestic holiness we begin to realise certain realisations about ourselves. Such a realisation is not a joyful and glad realisation. To the prophet it was a painful realisation that all men who draw close to God must realise if truly they draw close to God. They indeed must cry, "woe is me!"

Job had defended his perfection before his friends with vehemence and he was right. For in all his arguments he proved

them wrong and his declaration of his goodness was not false. They charged him foolishly with things he never did, having the certainty that such evil things couldn't have been without some wickedness on the part of Job. But the man Job maintained his stance that he is upright and I loved him for that. I love his strength and tenacity to out-mouth three able men. But when God finally appeared in a whirlwind and asked him a number of questions, his words were, "Behold, I am vile..." (Job 40:4). Though a holy man by all standards, yet in the presence of God, it was his vileness, not holiness, that he realised.

The apostle Peter had the same experience when he encountered the power of Christ at the great draught of fishes. He saw something that he had never seen before throughout his years as a fisherman. And when he saw this he perceived the man standing before him was a holy man his words were, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8). When we behold the Holy, our sinfulness becomes apparent. Things we winked at before would now become grievous to us. Things we didn't even know were wrong would now appear to be what they are. We shall see the sinfulness of ourselves and not just that alone, we shall also see the sinfulness of our world as the prophet said in his lament, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." The sinfulness of the world too would be apparent also, and while we draw some comfort in the fact that we on our part make good effort in being like the Holy One, it shall be a source of consistent concern and even grief to behold the evilness of the world we live in especially when the effort to make it better proves futile.

Seeing we all in this life live lives void of perfection, if there be the love of God in any man's heart, he will certainly discover, not his perfection, but his sinful nature and seek to do

something about it. Like Tarzan who sought to put mud on his face, or Olaudah Equiano who washed his face as hard as he could to no avail, he may seek to do many things in vain to be like his God, but though he fails he'd seek to be like his God all the same. If truly he loves God, he will search until he finds the one who says, "Follow me, and I will make you..." (Matthew 4:19). Loving God exposes us to his holiness and naturally brings about our consciousness of our exceeding sinfulness.

Meeting him makes us realise our exceeding sinfulness, walking with him makes us realise the inveteracy of that sinfulness. In meeting him we realise the striking difference, in walking with and seeking to be like him while at it we realise that that exceeding sinfulness is unlikely to change. When we come to him there will no doubt be a dynamic turn around in our life. At our conversion we'd cease from sinful habits, but that perfection we see in God or that his commands demand from us would be far and aloof from our reach.

Apostle Paul wrote, "For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection." (2 Corinthians 13:9). Nothing short of perfection is God's will and command for us. Throughout the Bible we see the continuous call for us to be perfect and a thorough and precise definition of what that perfection entails. And would any not be grieved to see how aloof perfection is? If at all we have the eyes to see things as they are we shall cry with the prophet, "Woe is me! for I am undone!"

Richard Baxter wrote, "Pleasure, profit, and honor, are the natural man's trinity, and his carnal self is these in unity." That is who we all are. The more we behold God and his commands and try to live up to it we realise that these other gods, in

trinity and in unity, won't let us do them to perfection. These gods love to sit on God's own throne in our hearts and give us commands on what to do that are diametrically opposed to God's commands. When God says we should not commit fornication, pleasure says, "hey enjoy yourself. There's much pleasure in fornication." When he says we should not steal, profit says, "a little theft won't hurt. There's much profit in theft." When God says we shouldn't lie, honour says, "are you going to tell the truth and bear the shame? Just tell a little lie to retain your honour." And in diverse other ways, these gods appeal to us and command us to disobey God. And our carnal self gives heed to all they have to say. So, we are never free to live a holy and blameless life except by continuous struggles.

Many deceive themselves that they are perfectly holy and there's no imperfection in them but they are of all men most deceived. It is because they measure themselves with wrong standards. A short man who measures his height by that of a monkey would consider himself tall. They are blind to God's own holiness and perfection which we are called to, and thus they consider themselves holy. A man like Job would call himself vile in God's presence, yet would some person far and distant from God consider himself to be perfect? As many as can see the holy God would see their exceeding sinfulness and the inveteracy of that sinfulness.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “He who says, ‘I am not a sinner,’ or ‘I was not,’ is ungrateful to the Saviour.” In the blindness of their heart they become ungrateful to the Saviour who died for them. And this blindness and the consequent ingratitude is what shall seal their woeful fate. The Pharisees of Jesus' time were a perfect example of people so blinded and didn't wish to acknowledge that they were sinful and blind. It is

written, "And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." (John 9:40 - 9:41). Their sins remained because they refused to acknowledge that they were blind. The same way those who claim they're without sin and refuse to acknowledge their sinfulness are only sealing their fate.

I understand if non-Christians would hold such a view of themselves. Not knowing God and not having approached him, it is understandable to see why they'd hold such views. Furthermore they have nothing to lose. Whether they acknowledge their sins and sinfulness or not, because they haven't come to Christ, they're going to hell anyways. So that's not important for them. But the Christian who has come to Christ, it would be really strange to see any who would not realise both his exceeding sinfulness and the inveteracy of it. Bishop Aurelius Augustine also wrote, “[he] Who come[s] to Christ has something in him to be healed; and he who has not, has no reason for seeking the physician.” So one of the marks of Christian is that he recognises his need for a physician because he has something in him that needs a cure. He who has not come to this point is yet to be a Christian and thus is in damnation still.

The realisation of our sinful state as it is opposed to God's holiness is a blessed realisation. Some people seem to love God so much but lack the ability to come to this simple realisation and so truncate their heavenward journey with God. This simple failure puts it all to an end. This realisation is key to all that follows in having a successful walk with God. May God enlighten our eyes to come to the blessed realisation of our sinful state in

Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Father, teach us to come to you and behold your majestic holiness. And as we behold you, may we, in the aura of your holiness, make the blessed realisation of realising our exceeding sinfulness and the inveteracy of it. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 32:
THREE POSSIBILITIES

"For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light."
(Psalm 36:9)

"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect."
(Genesis 17:1)

"And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"
(Job 1:8)

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."
(Genesis 3:8)

"And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die."
(Isaiah 22:13)

"And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly."
(Matthew 26:75)

Now we come to the three possibilities that come from knowing God and drawing close to him in a loving relationship. Drawing close to him reveals a lot to us about him and consequently about ourselves. It reveals to us his majestic holiness, and if we be perfect, it shall reveal our perfection to us, for we shall see in ourselves his very attributes. But in the absence of this perfection, it shall reveal to us our exceeding sinful nature. And our walk with him reveals the inveteracy of that exceeding sinful nature. We cannot misdefine ourselves in the true light and knowledge of God. In his light shall we see light and that light shall expose to us the things which outside his presence were hidden. We shall see ourselves clearly when we begin to love and relate with him.

There are only three possibilities for anybody who loves God, and only two of these things can espouse a man's soul to his God. Only by these two of the three can a man be at peace with his God. One is perfection, the second is contrition, and the third which is not of the two is to pull away from God and embrace damnation. We shall look at these three.

Since God had the need of perfection to walk with man, he said to Abram when he wanted to walk with him, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." (Genesis 17:1). Perfection joins you to God with perfect unity. Nothing less than perfection will do, for he is a perfect God. There can be no way a man can see that God's desire for him is absolute perfection and would not seek to be perfect by all means. Except

of course he doesn't love God. And if he doesn't love God he needs to answer the question which we asked at about the beginning of the book, "has God offended you?" And giving a right answer to that he'd discover he's irrational, unjust and an ingrate not to love God. But for the man that loves God he must pursue the pleasure of God at all times. He'd seek to be perfect in all things that the Lord commands him.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection." (2 Corinthians 13:9) And again, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." (2 Corinthians 13:11). And of Job God himself boasted, "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8). While perfection is high and above, there are men who have attained to some level of perfection.

However in a case where perfection cannot be attained, contrition is a perfect substitute for perfection where it is absent. King David knowing this by the Spirit of God said "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:17). As perfection could bring us to absolute union with God, so does contrition. A contrition marked by a broken spirit and heart. God will not despise that. This is the sacrifice of the Lord, well pleasing and acceptable before him.

Thomas à Kempis wrote:

"What dost Thou so much require of a guilty and miserable

sinner, as that he be contrite, and humble himself for his sins? In true contrition and humiliation of heart is begotten the hope of pardon, the troubled conscience is reconciled, lost grace is recovered, a man is preserved from the wrath to come, and God and the penitent soul hasten to meet each other with a holy kiss. The humble contrition of sinners is an acceptable sacrifice unto Thee, O Lord, sending forth a smell sweeter far in Thy sight than the incense. This also is that pleasant ointment which Thou wouldst have poured upon Thy sacred feet, for a broken and contrite heart Thou hast never despised. There is the place of refuge from the wrathful countenance of the enemy. There is amended and washed away whatsoever evil hath elsewhere been contracted."

The potency of contrition is hinged upon God's love and mercy. And he shall accept the contrite sinner as though he were absolutely perfect. Make no mistake about it, the contrite stands before God as a perfect man and contrition is in no way inferior to perfection in its efficacy to drawing us close to God.

In Luke 18:9-14, the man who in his perfection prayed before God and boasted about his religious activities and deeds didn't go home justified before God. Because he was proud. However, the sin of the sinner did not hinder his justification because he was humble. Let as many as have fallen from perfection turn to God in a contrite heart and he shall receive them back to himself.

The only third option left, if one is neither perfect nor contrite, is to depart from God and embrace damnation. If you fall from perfection and don't wish to have a contrite heart, the only third alternative is to be united with the fallen angels and be united with them in their eternal doom. That is not a choice really but

it is an option all the same. When one would not be perfect and will not be contrite, though he doesn't choose it, the only option left for him is eternal damnation.

Now, we know that no one is or can be perfect. The fact that all men are sinners is a fundamental Christian doctrine. And to deny this truth is to fall from the faith. It is written, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3). "There is no man that sinneth not." (1 Kings 8:46). And finally, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). Though we had said that perfection is not a mere ideal because it was commanded, yet we know that no man was ever perfect. Even Job who was declared perfect was perfect as a man not with the perfection of God. As we had seen, he himself declared himself vile in the presence of God. So perfection is not even in the option then because it is unattainable.

Damnation is not a Christian choice. Even those who live in flagrant disregard for God and his ways don't want damnation. Somehow they still want a blissful eternity. The idea of Christian blissful eternity they have may not be what they want but they don't want to go to Hell. The idea of worshipping God throughout eternity is one that makes them shudder. They'd like an eternity of promiscuity, self indulgence, abundance of partying and night clubbing, and other vices. Just an eternity of what they're doing here. They've never been to church and don't like the church, and so to tell them that eternity would be one of worshipping God night and day is scary. Others paint silly pictures about heaven. Pictures of babies blowing soap bubbles and running around, people lying lazily on floating clouds, and someone yawning with a harp in his hand and a halo on his head. All these are not what they'd want and since they're being

driven about by the silly contents of their imaginations, they don't really like the idea of heaven. But they certainly don't want to burn in Hell for all eternity and don't want to die also. So eternal damnation is not a choice for the worldly, how much less is it for the Christian.

Since perfection is far and aloof and damnation is not a choice, it reduces it to just one choice for the Christian person, that of contrition. And that is the only option left for the Christian of this fallen world. There's no other way to God's heart than by this means.

If we must fall in love with God and seek his love so as to be espoused to him, it must be through one or the other of these; perfection or contrition. Either we are perfect and happy, or we are sinful and humble, sinful and contrite. King David wrote in a tone of joy, "The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God." (Psalm 18:20 - 21). This is the kind of joy that accompanies perfection. I do not think the king forgot his sins so easily to wrongly judge that his hands were clean and that he were righteous, but seeing all that God had done for him he must have felt absolutely forgiven. But there is this joy that flows through our being when we live perfectly according to God's commands. And this joy could be born of nothing than the espousal of our soul to her God.

There is no other possibility for anybody that loves God. In the absence of perfection the only other alternative is contrition, and contrition, as simple as it is, can espouse you to God as good as perfection can. Since relating with God will of surety expose our sinful nature, and we must have the knowledge of our sins as

we all are sinners, the only possibility for a true Christian in the flesh is that he be a contrite Christian as often as he discovers his faults. The only way to the heart of God in this fallen world is through contrition. When you see any Christian individual or gathering where people are always happy, rejoicing and dancing, don't be deceived by it. It is often because they don't love God enough to be contrite. They are not perfect, certainly not, they wish to drown the voice of the conscience with much happy activity and vain rejoicing. You'd be surprised that if you come closer to observe their ways, they have unanimously Christianised many abominable evils and have given excuses for them. Their rejoicing would make them look perfect, more perfect than David. The contrition of the contrite Christian may even make him look vile, but while the contrite Christian griefs over a little fault, they'd rejoice over great evils and their rejoicing makes them look perfect. You shouldn't be that way. There is far more that comes through contrition than the chiefest joy the world can offer. Yes, the joy of the Lord is our strength, but that joy must come through contrition for the joy of the Lord is not the cheap mechanised joy we incite of ourselves. The joy of the Lord floods our soul when there's that inward assurance that we have been forgiven for that which we grieved over. Do you wish to have that residing presence where there is fullness of joy? Be a contrite Christian.

In the next chapter we shall take a closer and more elaborate look at contrition, the only option for the Christian person.

Prayer: Dear Lord and God in whose presence our vileness is made glaring before our eyes, teach us in your presence to abhor ourselves and our sinfulness, and approach you with a contrite heart. Help us to make that one choice of contrition and in doing this may our souls be flooded with your peace

that passes all understanding. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 33: CONTRITION

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."
(Isaiah 57:15)

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."
(Psalm 51:17)

We have spoken about the efficacy of contrition and how it can espouse a man's soul to God as well as perfection. Potent and powerful this contrition must be then. But what is this contrition? In this chapter we shall seek to answer it holistically.

As I said, when a man loves God, he shall naturally begin to see himself as he is indeed. In the light of God, he either sees himself as perfect or he realises his sinful state. Two things also must result from this. Either we are joyful in perfection when we see in God what we see in ourselves, or become grieved at our sinful state. Anything outside these two possibilities can only be as a result of the lack of love for God. Possibilities such as being indifferent, or being amused in the knowledge of one's sinful state, can only be as a result of not loving God.

Contrition is the feeling of painful remorse at the discovery of one's sins. Pain is an essential component of contrition. Remove the pain and there is no more contrition.

The Feeling Of Contrition

"For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me."
(Psalms 40:12)

Seeing that in this fallen world, no man is perfect according to God's perfection, when a man loves God and becomes conscious of his sinful state he begins to feel, not joy at his perfection, but contrition. You see, a sad aspect of the present day church is the absence of contrition. But the love for God and the knowledge of sin must of necessity produce contrition. For this reason we read in the Bible in Luke 22:62 "And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." Peter loved the Lord so much that when he became conscious of his sin, he went out and wept. There is no two ways about this, if you love God, anytime you find yourself in one sin or the other, you must feel contrition. If you don't feel contrition in such a state, then you don't love him. Whenever you see a person, or congregation, living happily and joyously in the midst of sinfulness and compromise, you can be sure that the love of God is absent in the life of such a person or in the midst of such a congregation.

It is written, "Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy

throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." (Jeremiah 2:25). It is when one has lost the ability to repent and be contrite that there's no hope. Provided one can repent there's hope. And hope must be kept alive and that by the continuance in good works.

We shall now look at the marks of contrition.

Marks Of True Contrition

"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."
(Hosea 5:15)

The right and moral response to the knowledge of sin is to first acknowledge it. This is the first mark of contrition. Admittance is the first mark of contrition else there can't be contrition at all. How could one be sorry for what he or she believes isn't wrong?

Failure to acknowledge our sins truncates our walk with God. God shall not walk with a sinner who adds the sin of insincerity to his many sins. The marked difference between Saul and David was the mere acknowledging of one's sins. Ask what was it that made God reject Saul utterly to the extent of shutting all doors of repentance and restitution to him? It was because he justified his wrongdoing. I used to wonder how God was severe with Saul despite the fact that he sinned a trivial sin and was so merciful to David who sinned a grievous one.

Saul was guilty of partial disobedience. The first time, instead of patiently waiting for Samuel's arrival, he made the sacrifice himself. The second time God asked him to annihilate the Amalekites, but he spared the king and the fat cattle. He carried out God's command but not to the extent to which God commanded him. That was his sin that made God leave him with finality. But what did David do, he lazied around while his army was at war, he committed adultery, and committed murder in trying to hide his shameful deed. Despite these David was still loved of God and walked with God till his death because he acknowledged his sins. On the other hand, Saul who committed a seemingly pardonable sin was cast away and all doors of restoration shut against him so that he groped in the darkness in which he died about the most miserable death in all the Bible simply because he sought to justify his sin.

From the moralist perspective, Saul was a finer man than David. He was so moral he spared the life of Agag. He defended Israel to the point of death and was faithful in marriage. However, he was stubborn, rebellious and outrightly disobedient to the direct commands from God. When Samuel said to him, "Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me... Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD?" His response was, "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me..." In other words, both God and the prophet are wrong and he was right. Both God and Samuel were telling lies and he was telling the truth. I shudder when I consider the gravity of such an unwise, yea blasphemous statement. And all he did after that was to try to justify his actions and that of the people. It was much later he acknowledged saying, "I have sinned." How heavy those words were in his mouth. Saul was well beloved of God, but his consistent rebellion against his direct commands and failure to

acknowledge his sins ruined his walk with God. His lack of contrition ruined him.

On the other hand, David was a man after God's own heart and every time he sinned he acknowledged his sins and was contrite. The first thing he always does upon realising his sins is to acknowledge it immediately, unlike Saul who'd first argue with the prophet. And that is why we always read of David statements such as, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD." (2 Samuel 12:13), and, "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done... I have done very foolishly." (2 Samuel 24:1). You can compare that with the responses of Saul.

Even in our relationship with fellow men, people rarely find it hard walking with, doing business with, or working with people who acknowledge their wrongs easily. The evil disease of not being able to acknowledge one's faults has ruined many homes. A man once preaching told of how he lamented to God that his wife never says she's sorry when she's wrong. He said God told him to put his ears to the ground, meaning he should pay close attention to her behaviour. It was then he realised that whenever she was wrong or did something wrong, rather than say sorry she'd cook him a three course meal rather than the usual one course meal. So that was her way of showing remorse for her wrong. One would think that saying "I'm sorry" would be the easiest thing in the world, but for some it is harder to do than preparing a three course meal. To others, it may be far harder. I've read of someone who said, "he'd rather go to hell than apologise" that is to a particular people who had wronged him though.

So apologies are extremely hard for some to give. But let's be clear, there are many reasons why saying sorry when one is wrong is hard, but chiefest of the reasons is pride. It is an extremely degrading thing for some to say they're wrong. And not wanting to be so degraded they'd rather not acknowledge it. First they've lifted themselves so high and placed themselves on a lofty throne of perfection. To say sorry is to come down that throne. If they don't get off that fictitious ignoble throne they'd ruin their relationships with both men and God. Let anyone who has this tendency repent of their pride and seek to become humble.

Jesus told a story thus,

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

(Luke 18:10 - 14)

The Pharisee was clearly far more holy than the publican on all grounds, whether it be his religious title, public opinion, actual deeds of piety, and all what not. And maybe he didn't really have anything to confess as a sin, probably because he didn't observe his ways well enough. Yet the sinful publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee. Jesus tied

the actions of these two people to pride and humility. This informs us that the will to or not to acknowledge one's fault is principally a matter of pride and humility. What if there was nothing known to Pharisee to confess. His problem was his pride. The publican had a lot of wrongs to confess and so felt contrite. The fact that he acknowledged his wrong was hinged on his humility of heart, not his acts of piety.

It is understandable though sad to see people show pride towards people they ought to show reverence, but one would think it were impossible to show pride towards God. But let's be clear, people do that. They flout his commands and refuse to acknowledge it because they're too proud to do so.

As these bad traits can ruin relationships with men, so does it ruin our relationship with God. For the woman who'd rather express her remorse by preparing a three course meal, had not the man paid close attention to her behaviour beyond what he would naturally do, that relationship was already strained and was heading for the rocks. The very first thing to do when we realise our wrong is to acknowledge it.

Many in today's church have cooked all manner of doctrines to justify their wicked acts just because they don't want to acknowledge their sins and the many evils their souls crave for. Like Saul, despite the written word of God standing as an evidence against them, they say, "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me." And thus is their doom sealed. The disobedience is bad but it is not that that seals their doom, it is their unwillingness to acknowledge the sinfulness of their ways.

The second mark of contrition is PAINFUL remorse. I spoke

about this also in my book PREPARING FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST (you can download it for free on cf-stores.com). Contrition is painful remorse. Take the pain from the remorse and it is not contrition. If only we could have brethren and churches who would even have mere remorse, we would have been better off than we are. But it is not mere remorse that makes contrition but painful remorse. If it isn't painful, it isn't contrition. The party and concert spirit prevalent in today's church in the midst of many errors and sinful practices proves to us that the love of God is shamefully absent in many lives and in most congregations.

I once heard a very much adored preacher (a fake one) say that God is so merciful that whenever we sin we needn't go about being so sad and remorseful because we have grace, rather when we sin all we need say is, "I receive forgiveness" and that is all. Jesus has paid it all. That was a very sad thing to hear. Hearing this, I picture a man coming out of the house of a harlot and standing at the threshold as he leaves, and with a grim face say "I receive forgiveness." Such evil folly is what was referred to in the Proverbs where it says "Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness." (Proverbs 30:20). If we sin and feel no painful remorse, like the adulterous woman, it is because the love of God is absent. If the love of God were present, even such a deceptive sermon from a much adored preacher could not possibly keep the heart from being contrite at every point we discover that we have gone against his will.

Peter loved Christ so much he was willing to die for him, and he wasn't bluffing when he said to Christ, "... I will lay down my life for thy sake." (John 13:37). He really meant it. Such was his love for Christ. Of the time when Christ was about to be

arrested it is written, "Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear..." (John 18:10). Facing the number of armed people who came to arrest Jesus in a fight meant probable death, but he was willing to do it for the sake of Christ. The cutting of the ear to me seemed not like an attack but a mere display of mastery as a warning to make them back off. So he was indeed willing, ready, and forward to lay down his life for Christ's sake. But what he couldn't do was to die with Christ. He was willing to lay down his life that Christ might live, but he couldn't die a death that wouldn't secure Christ's life. When Christ showed that he wasn't going to resist the arrest, it was then they all fled including Peter. So he was willing to die for Christ which to him must have meant gain, but he wasn't willing to die with Christ which to him may have seemed like a waste of his own life if Christ was still going to get arrested and killed anyways. Such was the profound love Peter had for Christ.

Christ himself was not in doubt of the love of Peter for him. Even after Peter's denial, he wasn't still in doubt of it. After he rose from the dead, he asked Peter thrice, "do you love me?" And thrice Peter answered in the affirmative. The third time he was grieved and said to Christ, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." (John 21:17). As Christ was not in doubt of Peter's love, so was Peter not in doubt of Christ's knowledge of that love, thus the statement, "thou knowest all things."

If even after Peter's denial of Christ, Christ was still fully conscious of Peter's love, then it proves to us that faltering in the path of obedience is no sign of a lack of love. On the contrary when Peter remembered what Christ had said, he went out and wept bitterly. The remorse he felt for his denial was a

bitter one for he wept bitterly. How grieved must that heart have been for a full grown man to weep so. That bitter contrition, is the mark of love and Christ could not but notice that mark. So contrition, not perfection alone, is a mark of profound love for Christ.

Charles Wesley wrote in a hymn:

"O that, with humbled Peter, I
Could weep, believe, and thrice reply,
My faithfulness to prove.
Thou know'st, for all to Thee is known,
Thou know'st, O Lord, and Thou alone,
Thou know'st that Thee I love."

To weep and be grieved for is to show that though we fail yet we love.

Concerning these series of events surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ, Hilary of Poitiers in De Trinitate wrote, "He [Christ] prays the Father for Peter that his faith may not fail: that when he denied through weakness, at least he might not fail of penitential sorrow, for repentance would mean that faith survived." So failing is a mark of weakness and not of a lack of love, yet contrition, painful remorse and penitential sorrow, means faith survived. That bitter weeping therefore must have been an answer to the prayers of our Lord for Peter that his faith may not fail. It is in the absence of contrition that we can be sure that faith has failed.

In like manner Ambrose of Milan also wrote, "Good are the tears which wash away sin. They upon whom the Lord at last turns and looks, bewail. Peter denied Him first, and did not

weep, because the Lord had not turned and looked upon him. He denied Him a second time, and still wept not, because the Lord had not even yet turned and looked upon him. The third time also he denied Him, Jesus turned and looked, and then he wept most bitterly.”

If in the knowledge of sin or failure to be that which you ought to be you feel no contrition, it is because the Lord has turned his face the other way. It means there's no more remedy. But if that be your case even now, if you'd but turn to him, he will turn to you, for so he promised (Zachariah 1:3).

I couldn't stress this enough, the problem today is not so much that we have erring Christians and churches, that were a problem though. But the biggest problem is that we feel no contrition. That absence of contrition is the clearest evidence that we have lost the love of Christ. Men would sin against God, yet no one would weep. Men would throw God's own commands behind their backs, construct theirs, and glory in their uprightness in the standards they have set up for themselves. In our sinful state we dance and party and no one considers, no one brings it to heart. This is the clear mark that the church of today and the average Christian person has lost the love of God.

The bane of the prevalent doctrines of the church today is that it seeks to provide solace to people by causing them to look away from their conscience and distract them with music and entertainment. They give comfort, but not the comfort that heals the wounds of the soul estranged from her God. Each generation of Christians seem to have this evil elements. John Owens in his days pointed out, “The whole bundle of the popish religion is made up of designs and contrivances to pacify conscience without Christ. They may make men self-justiciaries or

hypocrites, not Christians.” The same way we have a host of people who, by their foolish doctrines, make hypocrites, not Christians, for a Christian must of necessity weep at the knowledge of his exceeding sinfulness and not push aside the thoughts of his guilt. All such people who do such things are detested by God. It is written, "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD." (Jeremiah 6:14 - 15).

A song that reflects the true pain that ought to characterise true contrition is, "DAY OF WRATH O DAY OF MOURNING" by Thomas of Celano (1200-1265). One of the verses goes:

“Righteous Judge, for sin’s pollution
Grant Thy gift of absolution
Ere that day of retribution!
Guilty, now I pour my moaning,
All my shame with anguish owning:
Spare, O God, Thy suppliant groaning!”

We must in anguish own our shame and not in hypocrisy justify our wrong. We must plead for mercy. Joel 2:13 says, "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." The true contrition, acceptable to God, is not the outward show but the inward bleeding of the heart. The bleeding of a heart that cries to have offended his God.

The inability to feel pain for our misdeeds is a clear mark of the seal of God's judgment upon the damned soul. Martin Luther wrote in his letter to Pope Leo, “It is all over with the Court of Rome.” The wrath of God was understood by Luther to have come on the church of Rome just not because of any extraordinary catastrophic occurrence but simply because of its inability to repent or to be reformed. He said, “the wrath of God has come upon her to the uttermost. She hates councils; she dreads to be reformed; she cannot restrain the madness of her impiety; she fills up the sentence passed on her mother, of whom it is said, "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed; let us forsake her."” The inability to repent is the seal of God's judgment, whereas contrition is a mark of God's grace. Where there's no contrition there's no healing. But so far there's repentance there's forgiveness. And where there's forgiveness there's healing and restoration.

The third and last mark to mention is that true contrition must have the effect of causing us to return to God. This is what God wants, and this is why he looks to the contrite sinner, that he may have him back to himself. God says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." (Isaiah 44:22). Since the fall of man, the fall by which man was separated from God, the whole work of God and his dealings with man is to have man return to him. And so he calls us, having redeemed us to himself, to return to him. The evidence of true repentance is returning to God and not in continuing in sin.

In his book “Knowledge of the Holy,” A.W. Tozer wrote, “To move across from one sort of person to another is the essence of repentance: the liar becomes truthful, the thief honest, the lewd pure, the proud humble.” Martin Luther also wrote, “there is no

inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh." So the inward painful remorse that comes about by a loving heart realising its sins must of necessity result in a changed person. A changed person is the final mark of contrition. David sinned, but never went back to that sin again. That was why God loved him so much. Even though we sin, God will still accept the contrite sinner for he knows that the contrite sinner shall be a changed person.

Job 34:31-32 says "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." If contrition does not bring us to this point, then it is incomplete. Now, the pains of contrition is a form of chastisement, because it is painful. It takes away our joys. God himself chastises us. In any way chastisement comes we must bear it and it should cause us to return to God. It is meet for us to confess our sins and pledge to God that we won't do iniquity again. I used to feel that pledging to God never to return to our sins is a mark of overconfidence and that we should rather just pray sincerely for help never to return to our sins. I felt declaring that we shall not return to our sins is to put our trust in the arm of flesh which shall surely fail us, and asking God for help is to put trust in his everlasting arm which shall not fail us. But here (that is in Job 34:31-32) we are told that it is meet to tell God that we will offend no more and will do iniquity no more. I now suppose making this declaration in the spirit of contrition is not to put trust in the arm of flesh, but to express a resolve that the pains of our remorse has moved us to.

In the same vain the psalmist in Psalms 119:106 says, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." He said to God that he has sworn and will perform

it. This is a mark of resolve, not overconfidence. It is the resolve I point out here not the swearing for we are sternly warned against swearing in scriptures as though it were an evil above all others in Matthew 5:34 and James 5:12. So don't swear, only be committed to keeping God's righteous judgments and declaring your resolve to him.

Jeremiah 4:3-4 says, "For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings." We've spoken about breaking up the fallow ground before when we spoke about seeking God, saying "There are many grounds in which you'd sow your seed and you'll end up reaping nothing, either because of the nature of the soil, or because the ground wasn't well prepared." This preparation of the heart is setting the heart to seek God without which there can be no repentance. Breaking up of the fallow ground is one used by God to a people he admonishes to repent. The unrepentant are likened to fallow grounds that have become hardened and so can't be used to plant anything. Their interest is not in God and so the good fruit of repentance can't be found on such grounds.

People who can't see the wrong of their ways despite the scriptures witnessing against them are those whose hearts aren't broken. No sermon nor admonition can do them any good. That heart cannot produce the good fruits of repentance. All these people who do evil, women who dress like men, women who refuse to cover their heads and choose to speak in church, preachers who extort their members with extortive doctrines, and other practices that are contrary to scriptures, have hardened

hearts that need to be broken like a fallow ground. Only then can the good fruit of repentance grow on such grounds. But they must first see the wrong of their ways, else there is no hope.

"They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt." (Hosea 7:16). Repentance has to be true. There are many false repentance out there where men feel sorry but don't repent. They don't repent to return to the ways of the Bible. They are just sad for nothing and after being sad their changed self doesn't still align to scriptures. Such is deceit, self deceit, that we can liken to a deceitful bow. God has strong distaste for such deceit and will in fact punish it.

Such people feel remorse for things they mistake to be God's will because they have idols and false gods in their hearts. Other things that they serve in the place of God. And so they repent but not to be reformed by the Bible, they return but not to God. They return to their false gods. To such Richard Baxter, in his book titled "The Saint's Everlasting Rest" advices, “As long as thou dost cherish thy pride, thy love of the world, the desires of the flesh, or any unchristian practice, thou expectest comfort in vain. If any man setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a minister, or to God, to inquire for comfort; instead of comforting him, God will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols.”

These are the marks of contrition. Without these marks none can say he's truly contrite. Here's a verse of a hymn by Herbert Kynaston:

"O, on my body, not on Thine,
Lord Jesus, let me see
The blessèd marks of love divine,
Which Thou hast borne for me;
Compunctions sweet on hands and feet,
The pierced, the open heart;
Or e'er, without one faithless doubt,
I see Thou as Thou art."

Christ has borne enough marks of love for our sins on his body. His head, his hands, his feet, and his sides have been pierced. It is time for us to bear the marks of love on our bodies. The marks of contrition and compunctions on our head, hands, feet, side, and hearts.

It is written, "And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10 - 14). And again, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). True repentance asks what shall I do. The repentance that doesn't lead you to seek what you should do is no repentance. The repentance that stops at the heart is fake. Desire for righteousness and actions of repentance is needed.

The False Accusation

"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."
(Revelation 12:10)

Many of recent times have accused the Devil of being "the accuser of the brethren." Of course this is right and scriptural, however the interpretation is wrong. The interpretation given to this is that the Devil accuses you to yourself. If the Devil hears this, it were either he becomes very sad as he's being accused of doing what he never did, or he becomes over joyed that he's been made a saint. Yes, the Bible calls the Devil "the accuser of the brethren" but rounded off the same sentence saying, "which accused them before our God..." There we have it. He doesn't accuse you to yourself. If the Devil really accuses the child of God when he does what is evil or not, so far he accuses him of evil, we could conclude and call him that loving name of "shepherd of tender youth." But that's not what the Devil does because if he desires anything, it certainly is not contrition in the heart of a child of God. If a child of God sins the Devil would rather want him to feel comfortable in that sin and not feel contrite for it. If a child of God is standing, he'll not seek to accuse you of evil lest you start being more careful and draw you closer to your Bible and spiritual books and pray more often. Rather he'd wish to convince you that you are being too holy and that God doesn't require you to be this holy. He'd wish to convince you that there is allowance for a little compromise with God. Certainly the Devil who seeks your soul to destroy it isn't that daft to make you feel bad when you sin. All he does is

to accuse you in the presence of God and not to you. So he accuses you boldly and loudly before God, then he sneaks quietly to your ears and says, "don't disturb yourself, your Father which is in heaven doesn't bother about such minor things."

That said, should you ever feel guilt, don't think it is the Devil accusing you. No, it's your conscience bearing witness against you. Christ rebuked devils, but I can assure you that your conscience is not what you wish to rebuke if you have the mind of going to heaven. Many teach this that when the conscience pricks you, and you feel guilty, it is the devil, the accuser of the brethren troubling you, so rebuke it. And the conscience which is already weak by the sin committed would easily die once you rebuke it, thus, by this working of the Devil, many walk about with a dead conscience.

What do you do when you sin? Do you rebuke the conscience? We've said a no to that. Do we strive to persuade ourselves that God is merciful and has forgiven us? That too is a no! You mustn't seek to convince yourself that God has forgiven you. All you must do is to humble yourself before him in contrition. That is all what you must do before him, the rest is his work. The Bible says "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." (James 4:10). He is the one who will lift you up. He didn't say struggle to lift yourself up, but only humble yourself before him, he will do the lifting up. How shall you humble yourself? The earlier verse of the same portion of scriptures says "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." (James 4:8 - 9). You mustn't just stay there and condemn

yourself, but you must draw close to God. To do this you must cleanse your hands and purify your hearts.

The Bible continues that we should be afflicted. Many preachers don't teach this. Afflicting yourself is prescribed to us in the Bible. We must cry, weep, and mourn for our sins. We must turn our laughter into mourning and joy to heaviness. Too many laughing Christians in the church today. You'd think they were living a victorious life, but you won't know how twice dead they are in sin. We mustn't flout at the condemnation of the conscience, we must afflict ourselves and be sorrowful. This is the effect of contrition. Because contrition involves pain, many in the Old Testament when in deep repentance tore their garment. We too ought to rend our happy garments and afflict ourselves. We ought to stand there in God's presence, having no confidence to look up to him and beating our chest, saying to God "be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus taught us this in Luke 18:9-14. He ended his parable saying "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:14). Humbling ourselves before God is the only way back to him not shunning the conscience.

À Kempis Thomas wrote:

"Know thyself to be unworthy of divine consolation, and worthy rather of much tribulation. When a man hath perfect compunction, then all the world is burdensome and bitter to him. A good man will find sufficient cause for mourning and weeping; for whether he considereth himself, or pondereth concerning his neighbour, he knoweth that no man liveth here without tribulation, and the more thoroughly he considereth himself, the more thoroughly he grieveth. Grounds for just grief and inward compunction there are in our sins and vices, wherein

we lie so entangled that we are but seldom able to contemplate heavenly things."

1 Timothy 1:19 says, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:" The role of the conscience is to keep us in holy triumphant living in the faith. It is there to bring us back on track when we stray. It is meant to keep us from shipwreck. What a diehard enemy the conscience is to the Devil's purpose. No wonder he has sent deceiving preachers to help him put away our conscience so we can make a shipwreck. Please don't ever be fooled by his wiles, but rather resist him and hold on to a true and living conscience.

When we come to God through humility, he lifts us up and frees us from that guilty conscience and his peace floods our souls. I am a living witness to this truth. He forgives you so much that you'd wonder if he were rewarding your sins. But no, humility and contrition is of great value to God. Understanding the importance of humility, we read in Job "When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and he shall save the humble person." (Job 22:29). God saves the humble person no matter how cast down he may be. He will lift him up for there shall be a lifting up for the humble and contrite person.

Alternatives To Contrition

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the

trees of the garden."
(Genesis 3:8)

There are many things he who is conscious of his sin could do in the place of contrition. We saw the chief of them in the first man and we see it repeating itself in most men from age to age. This is to flee from God. When Adam became conscious of his sins, he fled and hid himself from God. Today we may not from the presence of God in bushes, but the way people try to hide from God is to avoid him. To stop reading the Bible, attending fellowshiping with other believers, or doing anything that could bring God to mind. This is just like pretending that he doesn't exist. Now this becomes glaring how this is fatal to our heavenward journey which is our focus. When we for any reason flee God's presence, we have successfully truncated our walk with God.

"Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." (Isaiah 30:8 - 11). This is a perfect example of what people who try to hide from God do. In their rebelliousness they shun everything that has to do with God. They turn from truth to lies. From right to wrong. They say "cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." By such rebelliousness men seal their doom. Sometimes such rebellious people aren't even aware that their ways are rebellious. And they don't even seem to realise that in their hearts they wish God would cease from before their eyes. But because they don't examine their hearts

properly, they flatter themselves that they're in good and right standing with God, all these despite the scriptures witnessing against them.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, “it would be no art (as I now see) to spin small, and make hypocrisy a goodly web, and to go through the market as a saint among men, and yet steal quietly to hell, without observation.” When we behave rebelliously and in hypocrisy paint ourselves to be in good standing before God, we only but steal quietly to hell. And that, brothers and sisters, is the height of foolishness. Better to own our shame and sin in anguish now, repent in contrition, and go to heaven than to steal to hell.

Another thing people do in the stead of contrition is to shift blame to someone or something else. This we also saw in Adam. He shifted the blame to Eve and even brought God himself into the blame game for giving him the woman. Likewise the woman shifted blame to the serpent. God loved the man and his wife enough to hear them out, but gave no room to the serpent to give excuses. Though he gave them audience they only used the opportunity to shift blames, even to blame the Almighty. Blame shifting resulted in God driving Adam and Eve out of his presence. This too Truncates our walk with God. Sin is sin no matter who we think is to blame.

Lastly, and worst of all, to justify our wrongdoings. We've seen how this was the ruin of Saul.

These are the alternatives to contrition and they all have the same result. If we don't feel contrite we must seek to hide from God, shift the blame from ourselves to others, or justify our sins, thus making God a liar. They all truncate our walk with God.

Now, why should we be contrite? Apart from the fact that all other alternatives we have for contrition when we become conscious of our sins results in terminating our heavenward journey, I have four other points to present as reasons for being contrite. They are:

- The fear of damnation
- Our utter weakness compared to his absolute strength
- Predestination
- Our love for him

Let's take a look at these points.

Trembling At God's Word

"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."
(Acts 24:24 - 25)

When we have the knowledge of sin we also know it is immoral and comes with consequences by the same knowledge. For if something is immoral and therefore a transgression of a divine law, it therefore follows naturally that there should be a dire consequence, else there should be no way, that is without a

divine law, to transgress by which such becomes sin.

When Felix, for reasons best known to him, asked Paul to speak to him about the faith in Christ, and he heard of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, we read that he trembled. But when he called for Paul to hear these things, what did he expect to hear? Fairy tales of how people lived happily ever after? Amusing jokes? What did he think he was going to hear? We can't say. But when he heard of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, he trembled and asked Paul to go away. This is how it is with everyone. In the knowledge of sin and the natural knowledge of its consequences that follows people tremble.

When we learn about sin and the judgment to come, natural wisdom moves us to feel contrite. We feel contrite for our sakes. Even when we don't feel bad for the sins themselves, we feel contrite and tremble when we know the consequences of the sins. When a little boy with a strict dad fails his exams and knows that he would be thrashed for failing his exams, he begins to feel sorry for failing his exams. He won't feel sorry for the failure for it means little or nothing to him. He's the least aware of the consequences of poor performance in his academics on his future. He's the least aware that he's wasting his parents' money if he fails to imbibe the knowledge for which his parents paid for him to acquire. He's not aware of those things to be contrite about them. The same way, though we are not conscious of the evilness of sin, it is natural for us to feel contrite when we know the dire eternal consequences of our sins.

When we read about Josiah we see a better example. For years and years before him, the children of Israel and of Judah forsook God and went awhoring after other Gods. When the young king

ascended his throne, his servants found the book of the Law. When the Law was read to him, the Bible says, "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes." (2 Kings 22:11). He rent his clothes, not just for the sins committed, but much more for the consequences of those sins that were recorded in the same Law. He rent his clothes because he perceived that destruction was imminent.

There are many consequences of sin, big and great, but ultimately, the chief consequence of sin is spending eternity in hell. The fear of this damnation moves the wise to become contrite and return to his God in humble supplication.

Some like to say that when the Bible says we should fear the Lord it refers to reverential fear and not the fear of terror. They often cite Adam as a bad example of someone who feared God with a fear of terror. That is saying it is not good to fear God with a fear of terror because it shall have the effect of fleeing from God. They liken the fear of Adam to the fear of terror, but I doubt that he feared because of terror because when God asked him where he was, his response was, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Genesis 3:10). He was afraid, not with terror nor the fear of God, but because he was naked. He was afraid of being seen naked. So Adam's fear is not a good example of the fear of terror and we can't eliminate the idea of the fear of God characterised by terror on that grounds.

The Bible actually informs us that we are to fear God with a fear of terror. The fear of God comprises the reverential fear of him and the fear of terror. The reverential fear is that fear that restrains us from going against his will because of our deep

respect for him. The fear of terror is the fear that keeps us from going against his will because we know the dire consequences of doing so. God requires that we fear him on both grounds and reason advises us so too. On fearing God on account of deep respect it is written, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" (Malachi 1:6). Of fearing God on account of his terror it is written, "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." (Isaiah 8:13). Mark those words, "let him be your DREAD." This dread is necessary in our walk with God and this dread is needed for true and complete contrition. Both terror and honour should characterise our contrition.

À Kempis Thomas wrote, "it is a good thing, if love as yet cannot restrain thee from evil, that at least the fear of hell should hold thee back. But he who putteth aside the fear of God cannot long continue in good, but shall quickly fall into the snares of the devil." So you see the benefit of trembling at God's word? So you see the benefit of making the Almighty our DREAD? Without it we shall fall into the snares of the Devil.

The person to whom God is good he leads and makes to feel true repentance characterised by dread. The inability to feel repentance and tremble at God's word when one does wrong is a mark of the seal of God's judgment. Not even the sin itself can seal a man's fate, but the lack of contrition does. When we continue to sin thinking that feeling contrite would absolve us, we are right. But we need to watch and be careful. When through continual sinning you no longer tremble at God's word, then know for sure that damnation is at the door. The contrition you think you feel is but dross before God. God has no value for such pretentious show of contrition. In this state where one no

longer trembles at the word of God, it means it has been disregarded by you, his commands are taken as trifles to you, and you've put him behind your back. This is to despise the grace of God as it is written, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

This deceptive working of sin is capable of sealing our fate as it means we have become cold. In such a state we must seek genuine repentance, for the repentance that is void of dread and trembling is no repentance. It is the man that trembles at God's word that he shall look to (Isaiah 66:2, 5). Let him therefore who has lost the dread of God's word be sure that God shall not look to him.

Let the world disregard God and his ways, and let them throw the fear of him behind their backs, yet let this be your lot and disposition; to "Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread." (Isaiah 8:13). We ought to live each day and each moment in the dread of God and let that same dread guide our every action, word, and thought.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, "What ye do amiss in your life to-day, ye may amend it to-morrow; for as many suns as God maketh to arise upon you, ye have as many new lives; but ye can die but once, and if ye mar or spill that business, ye cannot come back to mend that piece of work again." Knowing that if we die in our sins, damnation is ours, why then shouldn't we live in fear and contrition? It is written, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27). Seeing death can come to us at any time after which we must face God in judgment, we must live each moment preparing to appear

before the judgment seat of God.

Isaiah 1:28 says, "And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed." Any excuse we give for transgressing the moral law, whether it is grace, a forgiving God, or any similar excuse we give, would make us end up in hell together with the sinners. Repentance is what should follow our realisation of sin or transgression and not excuses or consolation of the self in sin by heresies. We must adhere totally to what God is saying to us by the scriptures if we wish not to be destroyed together with sinners. This destruction inspires fear that ought to drive us to repentance and contrition at every point we discover we have gone against God's will.

A verse of a hymn of William C. Bryant (1794-1878) goes:

"Blind are we, and weak, and frail;
Be Thine aid forever near;
May the fear to sin prevail
Over every other fear."

Amen.

Our Utter Weakness Compared To His Absolute Strength

"Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?"
(1 Corinthians 10:22)

"Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite."
(Psalm 147:5)

Now, when we consider the grave consequences of sin, one may think of averting it by all means. It works sometimes for men to commit crimes and still avert justice by foiling all attempts to bring them to justice. But what can we do to avert the consequences of our sins? Absolutely nothing, for we are weak, utterly weak, and he is strong, absolutely strong. It is written, "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." (Psalm 147:5). It is also written, "If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered." (Job 9:3 - 4). Not only is he infinitely stronger he is infinitely wiser therefore no one can prosper in hardening himself against him.

When people who are vested with the responsibility of executing justice lack the power or the will to do so people often go scot free with crimes. I remember when I was at a bus park once, there was this fat guy there who had clearly done something wrong which I couldn't ascertain, but there also was this slim law enforcer dressed up with a very military outfit as though he were going for an operation in Sambisa Forest. He was shouting at the fat guy at the top of his voice while the fat guy was looking at him quite unconcerned as the military guy was jumping all around the place. The military guy threatened to arrest him after which he started looking around for what to tie up the fat guy with. But as he picked up all the ropes he found around, they all snapped while attempting to tie up the fat guy. Till we passed them and they were completely out of sight I

didn't see anything that showed that he really could arrest the fat man if he didn't get help. That is how it is that many times people who are supposed to enforce laws don't know how to enforce the law. At other times they lack the power to do so. And at other times they simply don't have the will. And so many men go against the law and go scot free.

When people gain much power to themselves, they surely can resist justice and go about their criminal activity with absolute impunity. In his book, The City Of God, Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, narrated an encounter Alexander the Great experienced with a pirate of the seas thus:

“Indeed, that was an apt and true reply which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate who had been seized. For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride, "What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, whilst thou who dost it with a great fleet art styled emperor.""

Now, that man was right. People who go taking what is others by force, whether at gun point or by military conquest, do rob. But those who do so with great power go quite unpunished and are hailed as emperors. This is what necessitates the saying, "might is right." Such are people like expansionist Emperors and kings. They are robbers who can't be brought to justice. In fact they're the law themselves. And where their very will is law, where can justice come from when whatever aligns with their will is styled justice.

Can we for the reasons expressed here, that is having powerless or unwilling law enforcers, or having people too powerful to be

brought to justice, avert the consequences of our sins? Is God unwilling, or does he lack the power to serve us the just recompense of our sins? Indeed many do make God out to be one who does not care about executing justice on transgressors. Some, within the Christian fold, claim that he does this on account of grace. Others, outside the Christian fold, say he overlooks sins when our good works outweigh our bad works. But it is too bad to claim that the just God would for any reason overlook sins.

God is not weak nor unwilling to punish sins, neither can any become too strong for him to be brought to justice by his almighty hand. Listen to the words of Jeremiah the prophet, "Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." (Jeremiah 32:17 - 19). Jeremiah narrates the power and might of God and resoluteness to execute justice. Seeing that God has such power and might as well as the resoluteness, we are sure there's no averting the consequences of sin ordained by him. In the same vain is it written as a way of assurance, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7). That's a guarantee. There's no aversion of the consequences he places on sin.

Now apostle Paul asks the question for a wise man, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" (1

Corinthians 10:22). Whatever the thought that may be rising up in your head, you need to give an answer to this question. Are you stronger than he? Seeing who God is, the answer to that question is simple. Such questions are simple and seem to be unnecessary, but they are important to keep us in aright frame of mind and to remind us that there's no averting his justice ordinance. Seeing this and being assured of the dire consequences of sin and the almightiness of God, what shall wisdom lead a man to do if not to humble himself before the mighty God in humble contrition to seek pardon for his sins?

God's Divine Providence And Predestination

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."
(Acts 15:18)

So what other thing ought to move us to contrition? God's divine providence and predestination. This stems from our utter weakness compared to his absolute strength which we have seen above. The simple thing this means is we are at his mercy. This is a mysterious aspect of our faith and upon this mystery is founded a great divide in the two perspective-doctrine people hold about the Christian faith. One is popularly called arminianism and the other calvinism. So great is this mystery that the apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Romans 9:18 - 19). I'm not taking sides here between Arminianism and Calvinism because there's no need to

do so. But this fact that he's Almighty and we are utterly weak is another reason why we are to be contrite before our God.

If we are so weak and he's Almighty, then it means all that happens are things which he predestinated. Nothing happens without his divine providence. This brings with it a host of mind boggling questions. Questions to which there may as well be no answers. He reserves some to destruction and others to salvation so that they're not even free to choose. If what he ordains is what happens, then why does he still find fault with people who play out what he ordained to be? That is what prompted apostle Paul to ask, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Romans 9:18 - 19). And with this thought it seems the idea of judgment for sins seems irrational. To the human mind it does seem so.

Imagine if you see a man in a house who somehow has the power to control a boy to do whatever he wishes. Then he places a bowl of ice cream on the table in his sight, then he says, don't lick this ice cream okay? Then he goes out of the room and controls the boy to lick the ice cream. Then he comes out and thrashes the boy for licking the ice cream. It is bad enough to put the bowl of ice cream in the sight of the boy if you wanted him not to lick it, but what shall we then say if he himself controls the boy to go against his will, ought he to have thrashed the boy? Human reason says no, but divine wisdom says yes. That sounds strange and that was exactly what the apostle Paul was trying to explain. Seeing that everything is ordained and predestined by his divine will, why does he yet judge and damn people to hell? Strange but that is very compatible with divine wisdom.

He said to the children of Israel, "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 18:6). So we are like clay in his hands. He can fashion us into whatever he wants. And when he shapes us into what displeases him, he will punish us for it.

Some try to dance around this and would rather touch on less boggling issues of the faith here and there and dodge this important aspect of God's nature and power. And when issues go close to this topic they quickly discard it that God is too good to do such a thing. They say God made everything good but he gave us the choice to be either good or bad, and we, by our choice and free will, went the wrong way. They say how can a good God do these "wicked" things? This they say concluding that such actions must of necessity be evil. That is to make men evil and then punish them for evil. They pour out all manner of things and scriptural text to say God never created evil has nothing to do with evil. I'd have been glad to go with them in such assertions, but what does God have to say on the matter? Listen to this, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." (Isaiah 45:7). There we go. God claims he both form the light as well as the darkness. He says he makes peace and creates evil. He himself admits what people try to absolve him from. So who shall we go with?

Again it is written, "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). More questions to this effect of proving that God creates good and evil. It is by his will men become bad or become good. It is written in Psalms 65:4,

"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." So if he is the one that chooses and causes the righteous to come to him, his refusal to choose and cause the unrighteous to come to him is to make the unrighteous man unrighteous. And if it is in his choosing and causing to approach him that makes a man blessed, then the refusal to choose him and draw him is to make him cursed. So here again it is affirmed that he causes the good to be good and the evil to be evil. So while people try to defend him, he says he's guilty as accused. If we by our faulty standards declare such evil, God says yes, he created it. That is why the apostle Paul asked, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." (Romans 9:14). It seems like unrighteousness but it is not.

First the fact that God knows the beginning from the end, every evil that eventually happens can only be because he wanted it to. Because if he didn't want it to happen, knowing the future he could have averted it. For example, since he knew man will fall, he could have refused to create man and instead choose to make an infallible being. But he went ahead to create man and put there in the garden a means by which he could fall. And when he did fall, he drove him out and decreed that he'll die. So, let's be clear, God is Almighty, and we are completely powerless. All that happens do so by his will, power, and consent. Our very wills (good or bad) are ordained by him. Else there'd be no basis for the question which the apostle Paul asked saying, "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Romans 9:19).

While it's hard to understand, we needn't try to understand it.

This we can conclude for when the apostle Paul wrote on these things, he only gave us evidences that it was so, and argued that we ought not to question God for exercising his power and sovereign will, not that he gave explanations for them. He simply said, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" (Romans 9:20). That's no explanation at all. That's just a way of saying, "go away, who gave you the effrontery to question God?" And in things such as these that are hard to understand, we ought to acknowledge the limitations of our minds and the infinity of his mind. It is written, "O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this." (Psalm 92:5 - 6). His thoughts are very deep and the mind of a brutish man should be silent when it beholds the works and ways of him whose thoughts are very deep.

The reason why there seems to be a great division in the church along the lines of predestination is because many try to give explanations to what the Bible offers none. Apostle with all his great revelation gave no explanations to these things because there were none to give, yet men with far less grace of revelation try to give us answers being misled that they have answers. Hilary of Poitiers wrote, “True wisdom is to believe where we cannot comprehend; we must trust to faith, not to proof.” This faith teaches us that God is good and we must simply trust his goodness and seek to be like him in goodness. If any thinks this is foolish, they should look around them and see how many things they make use of because they fully comprehend everything about it. Many use paper without knowing its origin. If they told them paper was made of wood they wouldn't believe, yet they use papers. Almost everybody on the planet uses the Internet without having the slightest idea of

how it works. Some may even think the internet is in the air floating about. Yet everybody uses it for the benefit they gain from it without caring to know. It would be foolishness to say that because one does not understand everything about the Internet he's not going to send an email with it. To use it all they need to know is whether or not it works and once they know it works they start sending emails for their day to day transactions. But the unwise try to explain everything in the Bible including those that have no explanations. The Bible contains both revelations and mysteries, but the unwise, thinking they're acting scholarly, try to reduce everything in the Bible, both revelations and mysteries, into mere theories. And so divisions are bound to abound. We don't have to be slack in our study and think everything is not understandable by man and then drink in whatever anyone tells us about scriptures. We must study the Bible for ourselves and understand them thoroughly, yet we must place a distinction between mysteries, revelations, and theories. The doctrine of predestination is a mystery.

The Bible is full of texts that reveal to us the verity of the doctrine of predestination. Consider the following texts:

"Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?"
(Proverbs 20:24)

"Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the LORD."
(Proverbs 29:26)

"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."
(Jeremiah 10:23)

"O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance."
(Isaiah 63:17)

"And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbare, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel." (2 Chronicles 25:16). Here we see that when God was determined to destroy Amaziah, it was not to strike him dead, or strike him with a grievous disease or something. All he did was to harden his heart and make him not heed the word of the prophet. So the will of Amaziah was in the hand of God to make him take heed or not to take heed. And later it is written, "But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom." (2 Chronicles 25:20). Here we see a confirmation that the stubbornness of Amaziah was from God.

It is written, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13). It is God that works in the righteous both to will and do his good pleasure, not the righteous themselves. And so working he blesses them for the work that he does and when he refuses to work his good pleasure in the wicked, he also punishes the wicked for not willing and doing his good pleasure.

Apostle Paul, after telling us that we are in no place to question God, went on to write, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and

another unto dishonour?" (Romans 9:21). We too exercise some sort of sovereign will in the things we make. We make one vessel to put honourable things in and another to put trash. Are we evil for creating some vessels for trash? Maybe we should make all vessels for foodstuff and none for trash. We make a football for people to be kicking around in sports. Are we evil for doing that? Yet every weekend people gather in a stadium in numbers of hundreds thousand to watch how the poor thing is being kicked around and enjoy the show. This seems like an explanation but it is not. He's just giving us reasons why we ought not to question God for exercising his sovereign power. For he first asks, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus." (Romans 9:19 - 20). This is not an explanation as to the logic and reason why God does what he does, rather it is to question the effrontery of the inquisitor. When God wanted, he hardened Pharaoh and then punished him for being hardened. He's sovereign. He's Lord of All and King of Kings. Who can question him? The irrationality of questioning the Almighty is what the apostle Paul alluded to, not to give an answer, for I suppose there is no answer to this question for man. However there are few things to consider while thinking on such matters.

Selwyn Hughes wrote that as a young Christian he was taught things like, "it is only when we understand who God is that we will understand what he does," and "we must be careful not to interpret God's character by what we see, but what we see by God's character." He admitted that such teachings were hard for him as a young child, but he said that these same teachings built under him a foundation that has stood solid over the years. So these are the number one things we must consider when

thinking about this aspect of our faith. We don't call things evil because we, by what we see around and think in our head, consider it evil. And we don't on that ground claim God does not do what he says he does. We cannot but judge God wickedly when we try to explain his ways without first understanding him. And we can't but wrongly interpret his actions when our standards of judgment are built by what we see around. Before we can understand God to a good extent we must first know him that he's good, loving, kind, merciful, etc. And having driven this to the core of our understanding as a compass for our thoughts, we can then sail safely to the good shores of right understanding. So what God does must essentially be good, that is even when our reasoning makes it look otherwise. Like in the case of predestination, everything he does is good even when he punishes people for predestining them to what is evil. His ways are still absolutely just and perfect.

The second thing we need to understand is built on this first premise, and that is we must never judge God to be anything contrary to what he declares of himself. We are free to think freely about God and let our thoughts wander to all the hinterlands of the mind, but we must never draw conclusions about him or what he does contrary to his own declaration. Take for example, in Psalm 107 we see a narration of the deeds of God, how he brought about evil on some people, then brought them out of it, then put others again into another evil and then brought them out of it. One may wonder why is God like that to be dipping men into trouble and then bringing them out at the time he feels like it. That sounds nasty doesn't it? But the concluding part of the Psalm reads, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD." (Psalm 107:43). The same thing is repeated in Hosea 14. After narrating all the things God will do

to Israel and the repentance it will wrought in Israel, it is written at the end of the chapter, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein." (Hosea 14:9). By observing how God brought evil upon those who erred out of the right path, they shall not understand how that the Lord is nasty, mean, wicked, etc., rather they'll understand his lovingkindness and that his ways are right. Observing the ways of God could only but enable us draw conclusions that are in agreement with his declaration about himself that he's good, merciful, kind, loving, etc. Whenever, through the musings of our mind, we start drawing conclusions that are contrary to his own declarations about himself we can be rest assured that we aren't considering the matter wisely.

When we have these things as a standard, we will be able to understand him and his ways better. That is trying to understand him according to our prior knowledge of him, not interpreting his character by what we see but rather what we see by his character, and never to draw conclusions contrary to his own declarations about himself. With these we shall understand more perfectly and have more reasons to worship his sovereign majesty.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “in remitting a debt, goodness is perceived, in requiring it, justice — unrighteousness is never found to be with God.” And Thomas Aquinas agreeing with this also says, “Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.” God will remit the debt of the contrite and therein goodness is perceived. When he does the contrary and choses to require the debt of the

indifferent, justice, not the lack of goodness, is perceived. And in both cases (though contrary one to the other) he's righteous. In all that God does he's righteous and we must let this guide us as we let our thoughts wander through the terrains of our minds.

We have learnt to take the unpleasantness of life as something for which God knows best why he allowed it. It looks bad to allow us suffer, yet we judge him faithful for we believe he brings out the best through everything he allows. So also, we must, in this case, see that he's good even in these things which seem to us as evil. Though he creates evil, we know he's good and so he's good for creating evil.

I once saw a quote which I guess was attributed to Stephen Hawkins. The quote goes something like, "even those who believe in predestination watch carefully before crossing the street." By this he meant to say there's nothing as predestination and that everything we see is a product of our choices. He's right when looking at the will at one level, but at a higher level he's wrong. And this is what I mean, God who made our wills made them so that we would pay utmost care to ensure our well-being. So, even the caution you show when crossing the street is ordained of God. So we shouldn't with like arguments wrest with the doctrine of predestination.

We shouldn't also seek to hands off our life's affairs saying, well it's not me doing these things anyways, everything is God's work, so why should I bother. Rather, go through life as you would do normally but with complete trust in God and complete surrender to him. Do his will believing that he will bring about the best by the way you go about your life's activities.

Now, it is not wise to be discussing matters that we don't

understand fully well, why then would I be talking on predestination when I myself don't understand it. I only accept it but can't understand it. It is to make us see the awful majesty of God, his absolute power, his severity, his justice, and his transcendency. All which will have an effect of making us tremble and exceedingly shake. Our discuss is on contrition, in the knowledge of these things we shall find more reason above many others why we should not only be contrite and fear before whom our lives are lighter than breath. When we see further how utterly powerless and that our very wills are subject to his sovereign will, we ought to then surrender more fully to him and hope on his mercy through contrition. We don't need to start reacting as though what we do no longer matter (by the way, what will be will be) or try to resist the idea of God's sovereign will.

In God's sovereign will he says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Romans 9:15). By this it means he destroys whom he wills and he saves whom he wills. What then should be your response to this? Become dejected because there's nothing you can do about it? Or because it is all a matter of luck or what could be erroneously termed divine whim? Rather, your response is to enquire, "on whom does the Lord say he would have mercy?" And you'd find the answer where it says the following:

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."
(Proverbs 28:13)

"And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have

mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him."
(Isaiah 30:18)

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."
(Isaiah 55:7)

"Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us."
(Psalm 123:2)

And many like verses tell us upon whom the Lord will have mercy. He will show mercy to the contrite and repentant ones. It behoves us then to behave ourselves in ways that will make him have mercy upon us. This then shall be God's way of ordaining you to eternal life. But if you refuse it, that refusal shall be his way of ordaining you to eternal damnation. Be contrite therefore and repent of any known sin.

On the other hand, Nahum 1:3 says, "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." God will not acquit the wicked. We must never justify ourselves, but confess and repent of our evil ways. Seeing that the character of those on whom he'd have mercy and those on whom he'd not have mercy are well spelt out, let us choose wisely and be contrite so that we shall obtain mercy from the Lord.

So, the doctrine of predestination and all it implies is truth and verity, but all I can say is if predestination or grace is preached in a way that increases sinfulness even in the minutest degree, that sermon is of the Devil. If free will is preached so that we can attribute any goodness to ourselves rather than God, that sermon is of the Devil. We must hold the doctrine in a way that neither inputs any merit to us nor promotes sinfulness.

Our Love For Him

"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?"
(John 21:17)

The last thing we'd consider about what should move us to contrition is our love for him. We've been talking about loving God since about the beginning of this book and we aren't done yet. We've talked about how a child is contrite when he fails his exams because he knows he's going to get thrashed, there comes a time when he becomes mature when he begins to pursue academic excellence, not because of trashing, but because he now knows the importance of his academics. The same way that feeling contrition in knowledge of one's sins because of one's love for God is a sign of Christian maturity. We are not just grieved because we would go to hell, but we are grieved because we have grieved him whom our souls loveth. Even if there were no hell to be damned to and no heaven to lose for our sinning, we'd still be as grieved for grieving him whom our souls loveth.

When talking about loving God at first, we noted how Bernard of Clairvaux had said that the first reason man loves God is for his own sake and not for God's sake. This has an element of selfishness in it but will still grow into perfect love in which we love God for his sake alone. Such perfect love produces contrition, not asking “what have I done to myself?” but “what have I done to him?”

Now it is not that feeling contrite as a result of the dread for damnation and the almightiness of God is not a Christian feeling. It is as a matter of fact a very Christian feeling. It is a feeling that is born of faith in God and his words. It is a feeling that is born of the proper knowledge of that same word. It is a feeling born of a right response to that knowledge. It is therefore pious to feel contrition for these reasons. But feeling contrite on account of hurting him could come of nothing but love alone. Which I could say is a purer contrition.

Everyone must at one point or the other feel contrition based on these but it should not be limited to them. I love the way an Indian Christian puts it when he said [paraphrased], "I wish God will burn down heaven and put out the fires of hell that men may love him for himself." That expression was a bit too strong but strong also was the message it passes. We ought to grow to a point when we feel contrite for our wrong doings even if there were no heaven to lose and no hell to perish in. Even if God did not ordain any of these dire consequences to sin still to feel contrite simply because of our love for him.

If one loves another, the thought that he has been a source of grief to him would break his own heart, sometimes even more than the grief he caused. Such is the nature of love. To feel

contrite for this reason is a sign of spiritual maturity. This is the ultimate reason why men ought to feel contrite in the knowledge of their sinful ways.

Have You Done What You Could?

"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

(Matthew 5:29 - 30)

"She hath done what she could..."

(Mark 14:8)

Now we need to understand that when we grasp this doctrine about contrition our hearts in its deceitfulness could present to us a false security that merely complaining about our sins is enough. Every miserable soul that shall perish under means of grace are those who are good in misinterpreting good doctrines to mean a licence for sin. Samuel Rutherford wrote, **"**It is good still to be severe against ourselves; for we but transform God's mercy into an idol, and an idol that hath a dispensation to give, for the turning of the grace of God into wantonness.**"** The idea here is not to encourage people in the damnable path of sin, but to encourage people never to quit and to keep pushing and fighting on though they may be beaten down often. And so at

all times we must examine our ways to examine if or not we are really doing what we could to keep away from sin.

In Mark 14:8, Jesus, in a response to those criticising Mary for wastage, said, "She hath done what she could..." Mary was known to be a sinner, yet she expressed her love for Christ in this way, and Christ well recognised that love and so the statement, "She hath done what she could..."

I believe it was the same incident that was described in Luke 7:36-40. If so, in that one act of washing Jesus' feet we see the following, she was obviously sinful, she was weeping, she washed the feet of Jesus with her hair, an expensive perfume, and her tears. In her sinfulness she had gone against God's commandments, yet in contrition she wept. She wept so profusely that her tears were enough to wash his feet. In washing the feet of Jesus with her hair she showed love and deep reverence for him. In using an expensive perfume she showed that nothing in all the world was to be compared to him or worth what he's worth. There is no such commandment in the Laws of Moses that states that she's to wash the feet of Christ with perfume, tears and her hair, and she was found to have come short of the requirements of Moses' Law, yet her little sacrifice was accepted that Christ declared, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark 14:9).

Her actions are indeed beyond description. But every mark of contrition and love were seen in them. Jesus in the same instance said, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much..." (Luke 7:47). This explains to us that all that God requires from us is love. And to

confirm this it is written, "... love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:10). And again, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Galatians 5:14). Love is the fulfilment of the law. It doesn't matter how it is expressed, so far it is well expressed. The best way to express our love for God is in the perfection of absolute obedience. For as we have seen earlier Christ verily says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15). So perfection in absolute obedience is what is required for us to show our love for him. However, where we fail in that, the remedial way in which our love can be made manifest is through contrition and compunction.

For Mary, she was obviously a sinner, yet she still acted in love that Christ said of her, "She hath done what she could..." (Mark 14:8), and for this reason, her sins which were many were forgiven. In her love she demonstrated such deep and true contrition. Christ cannot but fail to recognise love wherever it is found and whichever way it comes. Whether it comes in the perfection of obedience or in the contrition of a sinner. Christ is a true lover that knows and recognises all the marks of love.

So the question is, are you doing what you could or are you just complaining that you aren't obeying the Lord as you should? Let us therefore be careful that we don't stop at mere complaining about our sins without the true feeling of contrition and the will to put an end to that for which we are contrite for. Mere complaining is not contrition. If contrition is true, we won't just complain but we'd also consistently do what we can to put an end to it.

Samuel Rutherford wrote, “I observe many who think it holiness enough to complain, and set themselves at nothing: as if to say

"I am sick" could cure them. They think complaints a good charm for guiltiness. I hope that ye are wrestling and struggling on, in this dead age, wherein folks have lost tongue, and legs, and arms for Christ.” We must do what we could, we must wrestle on, we must keep struggling. And not merely be whining about our sins and folding our hands. Give sin a fight.

Contrition is a sacrifice better than burnt offering. It is written, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:16 - 17). Yet this sacrifice, by the deceitfulness of sin, can be abused. Thinking one would be justified just by the feeling of contrition alone without a sincere struggle against sin is to act like the woman who, before committing adultery, said, "I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows." (Proverbs 7:14). She presented the fact that she had a peace offering to offer as a justification for the sin she was about to commit. Simple logic right? Sin now, be contrite later, and you'd go scotfree. No! The God who sees the heart knows that is not a sincere contrition.

Another person who behaved like the adulterous woman was king Saul. 1 Samuel 15:22-23 says, "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king." Saul disobeyed God in keeping back some of the good things of what he was to destroy and his argument was that he kept them for a sacrifice thus the question, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and

sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Because God accepts sacrifices or makes provisions for the remission of sins does not mean we should go on in sin just because we know we can be contrite afterwards. To obey is better than the sacrifice of a contrite spirit. Yet, should we find ourselves overtaken in sin, we should be contrite and trust in his mercy. The important thing is to be sincerely contrite. Sincerity is key.

Seeing that we mustn't fold our hands and complain about our sinfulness, we must ensure we do all we can in our struggle against sin.

Restitution And The Right Understanding Of It

"If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution."
(Exodus 22:5)

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."
(Ephesians 4:28)

Now I wish to talk about restitution. Restitution is defined as recompense for injury. So while we spoke at length about what to do in cases where we have wronged God to make amends, restitution is making amends where we have wronged man. All

wrong we do to men, if indeed it be a wrong, is a sin against God. And being a sin against God, his requirement of us is to right the wrong we have done to our neighbour.

The law of restitution is found primarily in the Old Testament. All the times the Bible uses the word "restitution" in respect to righting wrongs done to men are all found in Exodus 22 and only once elsewhere in Job 20:18, and the word was used only once in the New Testament but not in the sense in which it is commonly used nor in the sense in which it was used in the old. For this reason all those that hold the entire idea of restitution hold it primarily from the perspective of the Old Testament, and holding it thus they extrapolate what is seen in the Old Testament into so many circumstances.

Some of the interpretations of restitution I've heard of talk of the offender paying every single dime he's taken away in error or by fraud. One funny one I've heard is that in which the preacher preached that if you've defaulted in paying tithes, restitution demands that you pay the entire arrears. That was laughable and I know how optimistic the preacher of this error must have been about getting huge amounts of money if he were to be successful in fooling his victims. The error of that is first in the fact that tithes is the price people pay for not reading their Bibles. Secondly there's no such requirement like this in the Bible. Not even pertaining to Levitical tithing.

Another interpretation I heard just this past Sunday as I write these lines was expressed in a story. A boy wrote an exam, cheated, and got good grades with which he got into the university. He later realised his wrong and told a preacher who convinced him to refuse the admission he got to study in the university. He said restitution (righting his wrongs) demanded

that he should refuse the admission, take another exam and if he should pass then he should proceed to the university. To cut the long story short, he did that, incurred his parents' wrath but got help in writing his exams again, and proceeded into the university and graduated as a medical doctor in the UK. Not sure if that was meant to be a true life story though, but there is an error in this also which we shall look at shortly.

While the New Testament is silent about restitution by using the word, a lot was said about righting wrongs and these are the things I suppose should guide our opinion about restitution, not to take what was written in the Old Testament and extrapolating them even to life events that were not referred to in the Bible. Chief of the verses that spoke of righting wrongs in the New Testament I suppose is, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Ephesians 4:28). Did the blessed apostle say, let him trace everyone he has ever stolen from and pay every dime? The instruction of righting wrong is to steal no more.

An elderly man I know says there is the letters of the law and there is the spirit of the law. The letters of the law prescribes by letters the actions to be taken in saying for example, restitution is returning twice of what one stole, the spirit of the law states the object and essence of the law which is to right the wrongs by any means. The spirit of the law is more important than the letters of the law for example, the law says anyone caught in adultery was to be stoned to death, but David committed adultery and God's own judgment was not to stone him, rather God let him and the adulteress live. And so the letters of the law was set aside and instead the child which resulted from the adultery died. Yet the spirit of the law remained sacrosanct for

in the severity of God's judgment on the adulterer, he wept saying, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33). His judgment was more severe than death.

Not this alone, even in God choosing Solomon the son of the adulteress for a heir to the throne, it seems to me that the kingdom shifted from David to Uriah, for the Bible says if a man should die without having a child, his brother should take the widow and have a son for his brother. While David was not of close kin to Uriah, he still fulfilled the duty of a brother in this case. That boy doesn't carry on the name and posterity of the living brother but that of the dead. He inherits whatever pertains to the dead and so whatever is inherited or passed down to the child is taken to belong to the dead. So for the kingdom to pass down to Solomon by God's own ordination rather than the other children David had seems to me to be a shifting of the kingdom from David to Uriah whose widow David married. This also touches on the sonship of Christ because I don't think it is without a reason that it is written in the genealogy of our Lord, "and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias." (Matthew 1:6). Special reference was made of the fact that she had been Uriah's wife.

In my article titled, "THE GENEALOGY OF OUR LORD," I explained that the differences we observe in the two genealogical records in Matthew and in Luke is because while one followed the order of natural biological birth, the other followed that of rights and inheritance. It's a long explanation for which I'll recommend the reader to the article, but it means biologically, Christ descended from Nathan the brother of Solomon and not from Solomon as revealed in Luke, but by rights and inheritance Christ descended from Solomon. So there is genealogy of

biological sonship and there is genealogy of rights and inheritance. So if this applies, then in God choosing Solomon over other sons, the kingdom may as well have moved from David to Uriah. And we see that when the relationship between David and Christ is mentioned in the Bible, it is usually mentioned that he's the son of David "according to the flesh..." meaning biologically. So the judgment on David was indeed extremely great. Thus the spirit of the law remained alive in baptising him in the severe judgments even beyond death, yet the letters itself were set aside.

Just a bit of digression. Now that we've talked about Solomon, it is important to note that Solomon was no bastard. Someone would assume that Solomon was a product of an adulterous relationship and so think he was a bastard and be surprised why it is written that God loved him and even made him ascend to the throne of Israel. That would be so contrary to the nature of God wouldn't it? Yes it would but Solomon was no bastard. The child that was to be a bastard was the one that God killed and wouldn't let live despite David praying and fasting for seven days. A testimony to the hatred God has for bastards. But after the death of the first child, it is written, "And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him." (2 Samuel 12:24). The first child was conceived while Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, therefore was it adultery and the child a bastard. But now it is stated in this verse that he comforted Bathsheba "his wife." So Solomon was a legitimate son therefore God loved him.

There are times when it becomes expedient to set the letters of the law aside and hold on to the spirit of the law alone and that failure to do that would be wickedness. This fact was proven by

Joab, the captain of David's host, in Samuel 14:1-20. When Absalom was in exile and Joab saw that the king was yearning to see his son, he sent a woman to the king and put word in her mouth. The summary of everything she said was that she was a widow and had two sons. They fought and one killed the other. These two sons were necessary for her survival. If one has been killed by the other, the law states that the second son is to be killed for it was not by accident that he killed his brother but in a fight. Now she pleaded that they have come to execute the law by killing her second son. The death of one is already a big blow to her, the law states that her last hope should also be destroyed. But what did David the just king say? By the power upon him, despite being the minister of justice to execute the verdicts of the law to the fullest, he said that he will use this same power to protect her from that which the letters of the law states. And he did this with all assurance.

The wisdom Joab presented to the king is that the letters of the law must be firm but there is a need for mercy to use it rightly and that the law was not given to harm or to snuff out the hopes of people. So we see in this case that failure to suspend the letters of the law would have been outright wickedness and godlessness. For indeed the Bible says, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." (1 Timothy 1:8). The law is good IF... So, the letters of the law are well spelt out, yet in many cases both in the Old and New Testament, the letters are suspended. The letters of the law of restitution has been wholly set aside yet the spirit of the law remains intact. All the marks of restitution are seen here in this one verse (1 Timothy 1:8). Repentance is in stealing no more and working with the hands that which is good, while restitution is in giving to the poor.

Back to the story of the boy who cheated in his exams, righting

wrongs means you bare all the unpleasantness of righting the wrong. You can't make another pay your debt and you call that restitution. You have no right to subject anyone other than yourself into any unpleasantness in the name of restitution. Letting go of an admission which his parents had paid for to write another exam for which his parents are supposed to pay is no restitution. If it were his money then that would be restitution. What was done here was holding his parents ransom for his own wrong, that is supposing the Lord had required that from us. If he really wanted restitution he should rather have handed himself to the police and face the wrath of the law. If they chose to pardon him on account of handing himself over, he should insist on facing the wrath of the law for his object is to restitute for his wrong.

Rather what the Bible requires of him is to cheat no more. He'd still write many more exams in his life, those would give him ample opportunity to right his wrongs. If he wishes he could start a kind of volunteering endeavour to help students struggling with their academics prepare effectively for their exams. That would be restitution at about the best. So the stance of the Bible on restitution is not going back to correct things, but correcting one's wrong going forward.

Lastly, let preachers be careful on how they lay stringent requirements before their hearers. Do not lay any more burden on men than what their Lord has laid on them. Such interpretation given to the letters of restitution and the erroneous extrapolation of it is almost one and the same as wickedness. That is just like the Pharisees and scribes whom Christ criticised saying, "For they [the Pharisees and scribes] bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders..." (Matthew 23:4). This is evil before the Lord and earlier in the

chapter he warned his own not to be like that. So let's be warned.

What About Penance

"Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep..."
(James 4:9)

Now there's a doctrine that seems to be close to contrition which is called penance. It is not modern and has fizzled out, however let's take a look at it for I do encourage the reading of historical books so it is best to declare a stance on these things so only those worth resurfacing would be resurfaced. Penance is a voluntary self inflicted bodily punishment. This may be whipping the self with scourges or putting oneself through other painful exercises on account of one's sins. While not many do such exercise anymore, there may be thoughts on a milder way of inflicting pain on oneself on account of sin. I've seen people make mistakes and slap themselves because they're angry for their blunder. And you must have at least heard or read of someone wanting to kick himself because of his mistake. Having seen the importance of being contrite, some may choose to go this path too. So, let's take a closer look at it. I don't really know the origin of this so I can't speak against it or for it with certainty. However, I'll share my thoughts.

In talking about the practice of penance of his day, John Owen wrote, "... attempting rigid mortification, they fell upon the natural man instead of the corrupt old man,—upon the body wherein we live, instead of the body of death." So contrition is

falling upon the body of death, while penance is falling on the natural body. Penance therefore is an unwise thing to do.

Penance as voluntary self inflicted bodily punishment may seem to be scriptural if we consider fasting as a self inflicted punishment. That is we deny ourselves necessary food for our sins' sake. However, fasting cannot be seen as a self-inflicted punishment because it is not only on account of sins that men fasted or are commanded to fast. Holy men like Moses and the host of holy men fasted as well as our most blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, not because they committed adultery, but because of the spiritual benefits it had. So fasting isn't a self-inflicted punishment for any wrong doing.

When the apostle James wrote, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep..." (James 4:9), this has nothing to do with bodily affliction, rather when we look at it in the context of other things that were said, we would see that the affliction is the afflictions of a broken spirit and not of a bleeding back. To this agrees the scripture where it is written, "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." (Joel 2:13). It is our heart we are to rend. Not our garments. And if we aren't to rend our garments, how much more should we not harm our bodies on account of sin?

Jeremiah 3:13 says, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord." Deep and painful remorse and acknowledging that he is just is all he requires and our sinful ways are evil and he will abundantly pardon. I don't see a

scriptural basis for penance in all of scriptures, that is as regarding afflicting the body. We read of afflicting your souls but not bodies. However, we ought to afflict our souls and grieve for our wrongs.

The things called penance may also be used for pretence as John Owens also said of the Roman Catholic faith, "This is the pretence of their rough garments, whereby they deceive. Their vows, orders, fastings, penances, are all built on this ground; they are all for the mortifying of sin." Here he listed penances as part of the instruments of pretence. And he went on to say, "there is nothing in religion that hath any efficacy for compassing an end, but it hath it from God's appointment of it to that purpose.) Such as these are their rough garments, their vows, penances, disciplines, their course of monastical life, and the like; concerning all which God will say, "Who hath required these things at your hand?" and, "In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men." Here he condemned it as useless.

Or The Efficacy Of Contrition

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."
(Proverbs 28:13)

Now we shall look at the benefits of contrition or the rewards of it. This is not to say that the pain and sadness we feel over our wrong is what is potent to restore us back to God, rather it points us to God's immense mercy, and the pity he has for his

poor creatures and how he can't watch them get damned when they're contrite for their sins. God, in his mercy, has great value for contrition, and that is why the contrite ones will always find mercy.

Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Revival comes by contrition. God revives the contrite. Revival does not come with much learning or much craftiness not even by what greedy men call rededication offering or seed but only through a contrite heart. The lack of revival we see in today's church is another evidence that we aren't contrite which in turn proves we've lost our love for God. O may God restore his love to our hearts and revive his church. Amen.

Likewise Jeremiah 15:19 says, "Therefore thus saith the Lord, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them." God restores us to whatever we have lost when we are contrite for the sins by which we lost them.

Micah 7:18-19 says, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." And Hosea 6:1 - 3 says, "Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise

us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." These explain God's immense mercy and how in mercy he pardons and forgives.

Hilary of Poitiers wrote, "If God were to despise sinners, He would despise indeed all men, because no man is without sin; but it is those who turn away from Him, whom they call apostates, that He despises." God will not despise the sinner. Bringing it to our context, it is those who will not be contrite and return to him that he despises.

Isaiah 66:5, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." God delights in sensitive people who tremble at his word. And he shall strengthen them that they will not be ashamed.

Zechariah 1:3 says, "Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts." If we turn to God he will turn to us. Do you feel like God is far from you? Do you feel that he has abandoned you? Turn to him in contrition and he will turn to you. Contrition restores us back to God.

Ezekiel 9:4 says, "And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." These men were spared because they sighed at the evils they saw

around them. There's no record that tells us that these men God desired to spare were in fact men in good standing with God. But the mere fact that they mourned for the abominations about them they were spared. Being grieved at sin, in ourselves and in others endears us to God.

In the same way we read concerning Ahab, "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." (1 Kings 21:28 - 29). In Ezekiel 9:4 though we aren't sure if or not the men pardoned on account of the grief they feel for the abominations about them were even in good standing with God yet he was merciful and spared them, however, here we know and are convinced that Ahab was an extremely wicked man who could be ranked as one of the most wicked and depraved kings in the history of Judah and Israel. Yet at the point God declared how he was going to be punished for all his evils, just because he humbled himself and repented of his evils, God spared him saying the evils he had pronounced would not come in the days of Ahab. You can see how touched God was in the expressions of his words.

We have looked at the lives of David and Saul earlier in this chapter and it is worth revisiting their story again. By God's divine providence he has placed two great kings side by side to enable us study easily the efficacy of contrition. If they were far apart we could possibly not be able to compare them out of omission. But when by God's providence they're placed so close side by side we can't but notice the great efficacy of contrition.

And just to digress a bit, in the life of these two men is also

presented to us the cardinal importance of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy being the act of placing high importance on rightness of doctrine. Some people in the Christian fold today downplay the importance of orthodoxy, claiming that it doesn't matter what people hold, what is important is if they believe in Christ or not. And by this they mean just trying to do what is good by each man's definition of good. This they sometimes say thinking that the effort to ensure rightness of doctrine is often a cause of division. That's merely their opinion. But the lives of these two great kings reveal to us that holding right doctrines is far more than even keeping them. For Saul held the wrong doctrine that his partial obedience was absolute obedience, but David by rightness of doctrine held that God was right and he was wrong, thus condemning his own ways and justifying God. So when a man holds a right doctrine, though he falters and fails as David had great faults, yet by holding the right doctrine, if he condemns his way and justifies God, he's acceptable to God. But the man, though upright in many ways as Saul was a decent man, that rejects God's counsel by holding on to wrong doctrines, justifying even seemingly trifling faults, is rejected of God. So the church ought to labour much in the rightness of doctrine that men may hold it with conviction, and when they falter in it it may yield contrition.

Lastly, through true contrition, even sin shall over time bring about genuine and refined holiness. In contrition, even our exceeding sinfulness and the inveteracy of it shall result in us being holy. So not just that it restores and heals and all that, it takes sin in all its evilness and converts it into the holiness that God loves. For this reason we can see how that contrition is golden.

Bishop Aurelius Augustine wrote, “... it is by actual sorrows that

the swelling pride must be remedied." So, apart from the fact that contrition makes us acceptable to God despite our sins, it also makes us finer Christians. The contrite man cannot be swelled by pride. He has been, by sin and contrition, vaccinated against pride. By this means he shall be in every way a finer and more refined Christian.

For this reason the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." Just look at the many pious things godly sorrow works in the life of a Christian. Godly sorrow therefore has a function it executes in our Christian lives therefore we read the words, "godly sorrow workerth..." How then shall one be sorrowful if he's not made sorrowful by his sins?

We see therefore that the very ladder to perfection in a fallen world is contrition. By contrition we own our faults and coming to God for assistance we find grace to overcome and advance in the path of perfection.

The Permanent Marks Of Sin

"And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain..."
(Revelation 5:6)

God is forgiving and will abundantly pardon, yet we must be conscious of the fact that just as severe wounds leave a permanent mark after and despite being perfectly healed, sin, being a grievous wrong, leaves its permanent marks despite being pardoned. And for this reason we ought to be careful not to go the path of sin for any reason.

David was contrite for sleeping with Uriah's wife and murdering him. He was forgiven, yet the boy born of adultery died. After he married Uriah's widow, as a woman whose husband had died, the child then lived. He was contrite for that same sin and was forgiven yet his own son sought to kill him and slept with his concubines before the whole Israel. He was contrite, yet he was severely punished and wished he were dead. Other things the good and contrite man went through we have narrated earlier and don't need to repeat them. Our God is a consuming fire. He is kind but severe. His punishment is so severe that the living would wish to be dead.

In the book "The Story of the Hymns and Tunes," the author wrote concerning the hymn "The Bird With The Broken Pinion" (which I recommend to the reader):

"There never was a more solemn warning uttered than in this little apologue. It promises "compensation" and "healing," but

not perfect rehabilitation. Sin will leave its scars. Even He who "became sin for us" bore them in His resurrection body."

How true. There's always a mark left of sin. Not only did Christ bear the marks of our sins on his resurrection body, but it is written, "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain..." (Revelation 5:6). The Lamb in John's revelation was slain. It is probable that our Lord would bear the marks of sin for all eternity. As he bears these marks, it is possible that so shall we too bear the marks of sin in one form on the other.

The story of the prodigal son suggests to us that while we may not lose our sonship to sin, we do lose a whole lot to each act of sin. While the father of the prodigal forgave him all, it is noteworthy that he lost all and the remainder of his father's wealth was for the son who did not err. So while we must know that God forgives every sin, we do incur a lot of irreparable harm in going astray. I don't know what the loss of property could imply here, but we can be certain that there was a colossal loss and for every sin there's a death we die for it is written in James 1:14-15, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Furthermore sin wars against our souls. The apostle Peter wrote, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11). Seeing he addresses them as strangers and pilgrims, he refers to them as people on their heavenward journey. Yes their sins may be forgiven, yet the lust of the flesh war against the soul. Let us

therefore flee from sin though God be a very forgiving God.

So let's know that contrition is but a remedy when perfection is lost. But we must flee from sin nevertheless. Our God is a consuming fire.

Conclusion

"God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready."
(Psalm 7:11 - 12)

In summary, contrition when we err is born of love. We are told the whole commandment is summarised in love. And so anything done out of love is well accepted with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He's a true lover and would not fail to recognise love in whatever shape or form it comes.

Contrition must be in sincerity and therein do we find forgiveness. It is written in Psalms 32:2, "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

We must however know that sin is awful and resist it by all means. We mustn't fold our hands and let ourselves sink into sin. We must keep fighting it and resisting it.

Sin has its permanent marks that it leaves behind even when forgiven. We must be conscious of this fact as it would make us

to be more disposed to not allowing ourselves to abuse the grace and mercies of God.

There was a story I read of the Ottomans and one of their sultans. About that time there were false prophets claiming to be the Messiah. And the Ottomans too hold to a belief of the coming of a messiah which belief I think also entails that what follows his coming are many scary things. Scary to them. So when the practice was too rife of people pretending to be the Messiah, he caught one of them and asked him if he was the Messiah and the man confidently affirmed that he was. Then the Sultan called one of his archers and told him to pull his bow and aim at the false prophet. The courage of the man failed at the sight of impending death and he broke down admitting that he was a false prophet. This is a man breaking down at the bow of an archer of the sultan and shall not man break down at the bow of the Lord of Hosts aimed at his sinful self. Shall he not fall down at the feet of the Most High and plead for mercy at the sight of his impending hellish damnation?

To conclude, I'll leave off with a verse of the hymn of Thomas Kelly (1769–1855):

"Ye who think of sin but lightly,
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed!
See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of Man, and Son of God."

May God help us. Amen.

Prayer: My Lord and my God, I'm fully conscious of my sinfulness and the inveteracy of it. Help me in the light of this to be contrite in sincerity and keep a steady fight against sin. By your mercy may I find absolute forgiveness and may my consistent struggle against sin forge me into a fine Christian for the glory of your name and the beautification of the gospel. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 34: BENEATH THE FROWN AND ROD

"The LORD's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it."
(Micah 6:9)

"I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness."
(Micah 7:9)

Before bringing this section to a close we need to look at how to act when we are beneath the frown and rod of God. That is how to handle his displeasure and the punishment that comes to us from God because of our sins. The frown is his displeasure and the rod is his punishment

We need to know that God does punish sins. This does not contradict his mercifulness. It is written, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Corinthians 11:31 - 32). The reason God chastens us is so that we should not be condemned with the world. And again, "Behold, happy is the man whom God

correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." (Job 5:17). The man whom God chastens is happy. In other words he is blessed. So it's an act of love and mercy that he so chastises us. And that, brothers and sisters, is for our good.

The simple right response is to bear it. This knowing that we deserve worse and that this unpleasant chastisement shall be for our good in the end. If only we'd bear it. That is why the prophet says, "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." (Micah 7:9). Bearing his indignation, though the sin be evil and the indignation scourges, yet shall it have the blessed effect of bringing us to his light that we may behold his righteousness in the end.

It is also written, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:7 - 11). If indeed we are sons, then we should expect chastening when we err. If the chastening is from him then we can be sure that it is for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness. The end of his own chastisement always yields "the peaceable fruit of

righteousness."

Bearing the chastisement of God is a way of telling him that his judgement is just. If we complain or lament as though we were getting what we don't deserve we are making him out to be unjust. And what gruesome evil and folly it is to charge the Most High with injustice? And what fool, after doing evil in the sight of his God, will so much as sniff a complaint against the chastisement from his God when it is done for his own wickedness? When therefore we find ourselves beneath the frown and rod of God, we should bear it like sons. Bearing the chastisement of God is also a mark of contrition.

Even in life in general we find that this law can be clearly seen. When man fell he found himself beneath the frown of God. And what was the rod of God upon his head? Of the many things that were said in the day man fell, God said to the man, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground..." (Genesis 3:19). The man who chooses to labour and eat his bread in the honest sweat of labour is the man who has chosen to remain beneath the frown and rod of God, accepting from the Lord his judgment. The lazy man on the other hand flees the frown and rod and, wishing to find an alternative way to eat his bread and choosing not to work, hopes that somehow he can get to eat his bread without sweat. Then look and compare the difference between the two. See how blessed and what a blessing the hardworking man is to himself, his family, the church, and to his country. But see on the other hand what curse the lazy man is to himself and to all that encounter him. He shall steal, shall lie, and shall do all manner of abominable things to survive. If we are to analyse the problem of laziness to human existence we shall find that to be lazy (fleeing from the rod and frown of God) is indeed to be a curse. What a

despicable thing to be just because he won't remain beneath the frown and rod of God.

Let's visit Saul's story again. I like the man for his zeal for Israel, but his life is full of bad examples. It is written about him, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse." When Saul disobeyed God, God was displeased and refused to reveal himself to Saul when he made inquiry about what to do. At this point Saul stood beneath the frown of God, but he did not remain beneath the frown of God. Rather he fled the frown of God to devilish means to get what he sought from God. Since God did not speak to him, he enquired of a familiar spirit. And so God killed him. For Saul it was from one evil to another greater evil, all because he could not just stand beneath the frown and rod of God. And it terminated in his miserable death.

The frown and rod of God is not fatal, but failing to stand under it is. When we perceive gestures of anger from him, we shouldn't flee seeking solace elsewhere, but we should stand beneath the frown knowing he is dealing with us as children and not bastards. Saul should have remained beneath the frown of God and should rather choose to die than consult a familiar spirit. Even if he watched as God would transfer power to David, he should have borne it. But whenever he perceived God's anger he just wouldn't stand under it, accepting the judgment of God and pleading for mercy from him. When he knew that God had pronounced judgment against him to transfer the kingdom to David, he sought to kill David, an innocent person. When God

would no longer speak to him he turned to a familiar spirit. We shouldn't follow that example. When God is angry with us, we should only plead for his mercy and not flee from him.

It is written about the children of Israel when they journeyed to Canaan, "And the LORD said unto me, Say unto them. Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah. And ye returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you." (Deuteronomy 1:42 - 45). Had they remained silently beneath the frown and rod of God they should have saved their lives. Alas, men fearing the pain of his chastisement flee here and there only to find their doom.

King Solomon advised us thus: "If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences." (Ecclesiastes 10:4). There we have it. Don't leave your place. Remain there beneath his frown and rod in contrition and pleading for his mercy. That was what David always did. Let us do likewise. Our hopes must be fixed steadfastly on God, trusting on his mercy. Never should we quit because we erroneously feel he's given up on us.

David too showed he was of a better spirit than Saul in the fact that when he had sinned grievously, beyond that of Saul by a million miles, that is to have committed adultery and committed murder in the bid to hide his adultery, he remained beneath the frown and rod of God and submitted himself to whatsoever God

would do to him. He didn't, like Saul, seek for an alternative to God or to escape from him. It is written of him when he fled from Absalom, "And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." (2 Samuel 15:25 - 26). What a perfect spirit was that of David. True he had sinned grievously, true he greatly displeased God, and true God's judgment was heavy upon him, yet he submitted himself totally to the judgment of God. He said "here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

Saul seemed to have an alternative from God. Everyone who can't stand beneath his frown and rod always has this other something they have aside to which they can go to as an alternative. When God wouldn't speak he went to the woman with a familiar spirit. When the children of Israel disobeyed God, they had their own alternative plan which was to go and fight the Canaanites in spite of Moses' warning. They who sought food from Christ left when he offered them his body to eat. They had alternative sources of food. But they who would remain beneath the rod and frown of God are those who have alternatives for God. They are like the blessed disciples who, when all else had left, declared, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:68 - 69). Like David they say, "here am I (beneath his frown and rod), let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." It is people that have alternatives that flee the frown and rod of God. Do you have an alternative for God?

We must submit ourselves entirely to his judgment and hope for

mercy. We shouldn't also heal our grief ourselves. Let the comfort come from him. Our offences are not against ourselves so it is not in our place to pardon ourselves. But since it is against him so must both pardon and consolation come from him. How does it seem if someone offends you and while you're grieved someone else comes and tells the person, "it's okay. It's fine. Just go." That would be completely off wouldn't it? Wouldn't you, the offended party, be furious at someone else coming to pardon someone for an offence against you? When an offence is not against you it is not in your place to pardon and console. Pardon and consolation must come from the offended one. When you're grieved for offending God, don't console yourself but wait beneath his frown till consolation comes from him.

To round off this chapter, let's take some words from a hymn by Charles Wesley which goes thus:

"Jesu, I come my doom to meet,
A sinner whom Thou wilt not spare:
But I will perish at Thy feet,
The first that ever perished there!"

No man perishes beneath the frown and rod of God. But even if he would perish there, it were better to die beneath the frown and rod of God than to live abundantly away from it. No one can stand beneath the crown who has not first stood beneath the frown.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Saviour, teach us the wisdom of bearing your chastisement and so reap its blessed benefits. Help us not to be cowardly and fearful so much as to draw back from you. Help us to remain steadfast beneath your frown and rod. And

lead us to your light and grant us holiness. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

SECTIONAL HYMN

SAVIOR, PRINCE OF ISRAEL'S RACE

By Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Savior, Prince of Israel's race,
See me from Thy lofty throne;
Give the sweet relenting grace,
Soften this obdurate stone!
Stone to flesh, O God, convert;
Cast a look, and break my heart!

By Thy Spirit, Lord, reprove,
All my inmost sins reveal,
Sins against Thy light and love
Let me see, and let me feel;
Sins that crucified my God,
Spilt again Thy precious blood.

Jesu, seek Thy wandering sheep,
Make me restless to return;
Bid me look on Thee, and weep,
Bitterly as Peter mourn,
Till I say, by grace restored,
Now Thou know'st I love Thee, Lord

Might I in Thy sight appear,
As the publican distressed,
Stand, not daring to draw near,
Smite on my unworthy breast,
Groan the sinner's only plea,
God, be merciful to me!

O remember me for good,
Passing through the mortal vale!
Show me the atoning blood,
When my strength and spirit fail;
Give my gasping soul to see
Jesus crucified for me!

SECTION 6:

EVIDENCES OF THE MANIFEST PRESENCE OF GOD

CHAPTER 35: THE NECESSITY OF SELF APPRAISAL

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."
(1 John 2:3)

Before we embark on this section it would be good to mention that I had moved two sections that were supposed to come before this section to another book because it would be better to deal with them there. However it is also good to mention briefly that the content of those sections borders around the fact that there is work to do on maintaining a holy Christian life. Failures in the way of righteousness shall abound but despite this, there's no time when we should lose hope of attaining to that blessed eternal repose. We must strive and push our way through to our eternal abode. More on that in another book. That said, let's move to the issue at hand.

At the risk of theorising about spiritual matters using mundane things and approach, I wish to present something to us. I believe that the use of a carnal approach to things in spiritual matters is the basis of many misconceptions and misapplication of misconceived notions in the affairs of the Christian church. For example we have a complex structure of hierarchy in the church where there's a senior pastor with chains of subordinates. Such structure is often set according to the academic laurels, followed

by years of experience, all in perfect emulation of the system of the world. But we don't see the like in the Bible. They were all brethren and if one was ever perceived to be ahead of another, it was on account of the power of God manifested in his life. It is also from the world that we have adopted the garbage of democratic process in appointing leaders in the church whereas in Bible days, men were appointed according to the leading of the Holy Ghost or his express choice. We won't go further into that, but I'm conscious that following the system of the world in church affairs is extremely dangerous. However, for illustration purposes I wish to make a little reference to a system used in the world, though not necessarily worldly for, as we shall see, if we look into the Bible well enough we shall see it very much in there. Even so, I hope the end will justify the means.

In all areas of management process appraisal is extremely important. There is a need to appraise the process to ensure that it is achieving the purpose for which the process was designed. The process in management is called PDCA which stands for Plan, Do, Check, and Act. When you plan, you execute the plan in doing, but after doing you need to check. At the end of each process we must sit back and consider what were the goals meant to be achieved before the commencement of the process. Were all the goals achieved? If no, what went wrong and how could it be rectified? Even if yes, how well were they achieved? If they were achieved fairly well, are there ways that the goals could have been better achieved? To be able to tell how well a plan was achieved there has to be something called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) drawn up and matched with the results. These KPIs help to draw up evidences by which performances are determined. All these need to be considered for the sake of future decisions. Once the appraisal has been completed, you then act on your findings. Ignoring this principle

is why many businesses collapse even after a long while of appearing to be doing well.

So, appraisal is very important because valuable time and resources are put into executing these plans and they must not be wasted. I have seen many people in the course of management and administration not having KPIs or having faulty ones end up deceiving themselves thinking progress is being made where no progress is being made. Not only does proper KPIs help against the futility of endeavours but it also saves from self deception.

If such care needs to be taken for mundane things as to ensure the judicious use of time, skill, and resources, how much more do we need to take infinite more care for the safety and security of our souls which is valued by Christ to be of far more worth than the entire world. According to Christ, to gain the world and lose the soul is bad business. For this reason, as the object of all we've discussed in this book is to live lives by which we shall experience the residing manifest presence of God, as we progress in our lives we need to look at the evidences of the manifest presence of God in our lives. By this we shall be able to know if we are merely wasting our time, or if when we are enjoying his manifest presence there were things that need to be better done.

In spiritual matters such steps also play a huge role in spiritual success. It is written, "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." (Galatians 6:4). Every man ought to prove his own work and see how well he's doing. And again, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). We examine

ourselves with the intent of proving whether we are in the faith. These were Christians he was talking to for if they were not Christians they won't be reading or listening to his epistles. Yet, despite being Christians he presented them the fact that they needed to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. Such examinations, because it's very important, ought to be done regularly. And all these are on a personal basis, not a congregational activity. Everyman should examine his own self.

The Christian faith as a whole has much to do with proving. And in proving there is the important need for providing evidences. It is written, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21). So before we hold to anything we must first prove it, decipher which is good and which is not. Having done this we then hold fast to that which is good. The apostle Paul also wrote, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." (1 Timothy 3:8 - 10). Here it speaks about the office of a deacon. The apostle listed the qualities of a good bishop then proceeded that before they are given the office of deacon, these things which he mentioned must first be proved. All these which we've spoken about all entail some form of investigation, examination, and evidence gathering. Now seeing that these things are necessary to the Christian life and the church, we can be sure that we would be a colossal failure if we don't know the art of proving. There's no way we would be able to prove that a man has the qualities of a bishop if we don't know how to prove ourselves first. Indeed as we are commanded to prove all things, we must start with ourselves. If we can't prove ourselves to mark the evidences of the Residing Manifest Presence of God with us and in us, how

shall we prove any other thing?

This quality of being able to know how to prove things was very evident in the lives of the early bishops of the Christian churches. Their lives and ministry was like that of a police or a police department. In reading about the life of the bishops they were always proving, trying, defending, upholding and pulling down doctrines in their effort to maintain a pure religion in the unity of God's word. When Arius was going about peddling his heresies, bishop Alexander of Alexandria immediately invited him and standing before him and the other bishops, he cross examined him and by thorough interrogation made him contradict himself and lay bare his error in their presence, and there and then his works were condemned as being heretic. However the heretic still continued in his evil ways, which was later finally banished at the ecumenical council of Nicea. On his way to be restored to the church without showing proper remorse, he died mysteriously. Great was the way they were able to prove the truth and banish heresies.

Bishop Leo of Rome himself said in one of his homilies the following words:

"It will be sufficient to indicate a few instances, that you may, from what you hear, conjecture what from modesty we omit. In the matter of their rites, however, which are as indecent morally as they are religiously, we cannot keep silence about that which the Lord has been pleased to reveal to our inquiries, lest any one should think we have trusted in this thing to vague rumours and uncertain opinions. And so with bishops and presbyters sitting beside me, and Christian nobles assembled in the same place, we ordered their elect men and women to be brought before us. And when they had made many disclosures concerning

their perverse tenets and their mode of conducting festivals, they revealed this story of utter depravity also, which I blush to describe but which has been so carefully investigated that no grounds for doubt are left for the incredulous or for cavillers."

He also said:

"For after investigating almost all false believers' opinions, even those which presume to deny the Holy Spirit, we come to the conclusion that hardly any one has gone astray, unless he has refused to believe the reality of the two natures in Christ under the confession of one Person."

Kindly note how careful the great bishop was to dissociate himself and his associates from vagueness of ideas and uncertain opinion. They were keen on standing upon truth and verity and here showed that in their dealings they left no grounds for doubts. They proved almost all things by thorough investigation. These things cannot be done without proving each and everything we hold on matters of faith. Such were the ways of our noble fathers.

So, in our discuss on the residing manifest presence, there's a need to have things that act as evidences. Evidences that enable us know that we indeed know him. Carefully drawn out marks by which we can decipher the state of our walk with God. What in the business and administrative world are KPIs? While we had said that any walk with God that stops short of heaven is an unsuccessful walk and that going to heaven is the ultimate essence of our discussion in this book, we yet may evaluate ourselves, without reaching (or failing) to reach heaven first, by seeking the evidences that should characterise a close and careful walk with God. There are marks by which we know if we are on

the right course. It is at some of those marks we shall be looking at in this section.

It would be foolish to wait till the judgment day to know if or not we are walking steadfastly by God, a time when it would be too late to do anything about it. It is better to judge ourselves each passing day by looking at these evidences and check for proofs that we are still walking with our God and consequently still on our heavenward journey. This present time when we can still do something about it (that is if we have a faulty walk with God) is the best time to seek to know if we are walking with him.

So, in this penultimate section I wish to present us with some of the evidences by which we may know if we are on the right course. Things to help us know we are dwelling in the residing manifest presence of God. May God reveal ourselves to us as we go on in this book. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Father, help us to be able to observe our ways each step of the way to see if we are still on the mark. Show us the way marks that define our walk with you so that we can keep on track all our lives through. This we pray in the dear name of your Son. Amen.

CHAPTER 36: DEATH AND THE REVELATION OF OUR TRUE SELF

"... there shall no man see me, and live."
(Exodus 33:20)

"Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength."
(Daniel 10:8)

It baffles me that today when Christians gather, what you hear will make you wonder if these were actually gathered in the name of the Lord. Once upon a time, the hymn of the Young Women's Christian Association was "TRUEHEARTED, WHOLEHEARTED, FAITHFUL AND LOYAL." And that happens to be one of my all time best hymns. I don't think there's a hymn that harps on consecration as that hymn. The title of the hymn would of course serve as their motto as the hymn calls the statement a watch word. But today what would one hear from young women's Christian associations? I have been privileged to hear some of the things that come from the mind of the modern day Christian woman. They always border around things as this, "beautiful just the way you are," "beautifully and wonderfully

made," "attractive for God." If these are topics of discussions in Christian female meetings of this generation, falling from the graces of the previous ones, then I suppose that of the next generation, following the trend, would be "seductive for God." Of cause they are seductive already only that it is not affirmed this way yet. Maybe the next generation will be bolder. What we wear is abominable, both on the elderly and the young ones. Putting on clothes that exposes one's body shape [perhaps to God's "glory"], putting on of trousers, wearing transparent clothes, and making up like Jezebels. Isn't that seductive already. O yes it is.

You'll be surprise to see young women gather and bring up one of the wonderful discussion topics mentioned above, and while they yet discuss, slowly everybody's heads in their meetings start swelling gradually as they heap praises on their sex, and their scarves and headgears begin to get untied, that too gradually as a result of the swelling head, and very soon they stop putting on scarves to church and leave their heads bare when they come to church, probably because there's no scarf big enough for their new head size. Why? Some people realised that they're wonderfully and fearfully made. Why? They want to be attractive for God. After their meetings they float about like hot air balloons. They meet and meet and meet but nothing to show that they have been in the presence of God. They become heady, pompous, arrogant, snobbish, foolish, and anything else but humble though they had been meeting. But they want us to believe that they had been meeting in God's presence all the while. Sadly the predicament among males can sometimes come close to this too.

At other times while you'd think that you had come to a Christian gathering to worship God, to learn about him, and to

know what you are to do for him, a man would mount the pulpit to say, "Jesus said 'He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:38). When he says this, he'd be quick to point out that you can find catfish in rivers to satisfy our bellies. Of course not literally, but I mean that they twist everything holy in the Holy Bible to preach sermons of greed and selfishness. Even our most pious acts when confused by such venomous sermons are marred by the filth of the consequent selfishness. It's all about us, and none about him. Even that which is clearly stated to be about him, we twist and turn to make it all about us still.

Death

"... there shall no man see me, and live."
(Exodus 33:20)

From the above text, the choice to experience the manifest presence of God is what I term the blessed suicide. Suicide because if one knew that what he's about to do will bring him death and still goes ahead to do it, that is suicide. But it is a blessed one. So the first evidence of the manifest presence of God is death.

Daniel, when he had seen the vision from God, he said "Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." (Daniel 10:8). The being who he saw in this vision had the description John gave

of Christ in the book of Revelations too. Let's compare the two visions.

Daniel's: *he was girded with fine Gold of Uphaz.*
John's: *he was girded with a golden girdle.*

Daniel's: *his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass.*
John's: *his feet was like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.*

Daniel: *his eyes were as lamps of fire.*
John's: *his eyes were as a flame of fire.*
(Note: Christ qualified himself as "the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." meaning these are a distinguishing quality of his. No angel or any other being could have such quality).

Daniel's: *the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude.*
John's: his voice as the sound of many waters.
(Note: John compared the voice of many waters to that of the multitude in Revelations 19:6, and the prophet Ezekiel also said the voice of God sounded like many waters in Ezekiel 43:2).

And Finally, Christ says in Revelation 2:18, "And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." One of the distinctive qualities Jesus used to describe himself is that he had eyes like flames of fire and feet like brass. If he qualifies himself by a thing, then it is certain that none other can have that quality, for if he identifies himself with these qualities while another has it, then it is sure to result in confusion and the authority with which his words come be put in doubt. It is worthy of note that whenever God speaks he

introduces himself by some distinctive name or quality possessed by him alone. This, I believe, is to enable the hearers know and understand the authority behind those words. Throughout the book of Revelations, Christ does these things too. He introduces himself with a number of distinct qualities that only himself possesses. We therefore can be near absolute certainty that it was Jesus who appeared to Daniel.

Many believe that the man that spoke to Daniel was the angel Gabriel, but a closer look would help us see that he was not. In Daniel 10, there is no mention of Gabriel in the entire chapter. There are three things that would make us doubt if this was Christ or not. The first is the fact that he was withstood by the Prince of Persia for twenty one days. The second is that he found himself in a situation that angel Michael helped him (if he could have done it without the help of angel Michael or not is what we don't know). The third is that when addressing him Daniel used the word that when translated does not have the capital L, when he calls the man "Lord." Those are the three things.

For the first, the idea of Christ being warred against is not unscriptural. In the book of Revelations it is written, "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army." (Revelation 19:19). And it is written, "These [the Beast and his malign cohorts] shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." (Revelation 17:14). So the fact that the Prince of Persia withstood him doesn't make him any less Christ.

For the second, the fact that angel Michael helped him seems to

reduce him from being the all-sufficient one. But it doesn't. First these are deeply spiritual matters that one can't perceive exactly the nature of things with the eye of flesh. So we can't even say the nature of the help. For service to God is a form of help, only that it is a help that he can do without, yet we all, as his children, do render some sort of service to him (or at least we all ought to do so). In Revelation 17:14 which we've referred to, it is written, "they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." This was given as a reason why he overcame the Beast. Of course he's Lord of Lords and King of kings, and could have won it all by himself, but he chooses to wage war with his called and chosen ones. Furthermore, just as he said that angel Michael helped him in the book of Daniel, we see this same form of alliance between Christ and angel Michael in the book of Revelations also. For it is written, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven." (Revelation 12:7 - 8). So Michael had his angels with which he fought in the Lord's wars. We his children also engage in the Lord's wars for it is written, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12). And the outcome of our wars was spelled out in Revelation 12 where it says, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." (Revelation 12:11). Christ has many helpers though he can do without these helps. So the fact that he said Michael helped him doesn't take away from him any aspect of his Godhead.

The third is that when addressing him, the term that Daniel used in defining the Lord was with a small letter L, as in "lord."

Probably the thing responsible for having the letters of the word "lord" capitalised in different ways is because of the word used in the original language from which it was translated to English language. So he probably used a word that wasn't as reverent as would require a capital L. But that doesn't change anything either as this may have been due to the fact that Daniel didn't know the excellency of him who stood before him. We see this happen when God came to destroy Sodom. Abraham recognising his excellency called him Lord with the L capitalised. But when Lot saw him and the company with him, he called them lords with no letter capitalised (Genesis 19:2). But later, after perceiving the manner of people that they were, he then addressed them as "Lord" with a capital L, though some Bible apps and online references of the same King James Bible use the word "LORD" with all letters capitalised. So the fact that Daniel called him "lord" with a small letter L only shows that he probably didn't perceive the excellency of Christ who stood before him.

So evidently it was Christ that Daniel, like the apostle John, saw. And these great men, both seeing Christ and being in his manifest presence, their responses were similar. Here are there similarities:

Daniel's: *then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.*
John's: *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.*

Another character out of our comparison that experienced God's manifest presence was Ezekiel. He says, "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I

saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake." (Ezekiel 1:28). Ezekiel too fell on his face when he saw the mere likeness of the glory of God. And falling he remained on his face.

After this event he witnessed the manifest presence of God yet again. This time it was by the rivers of Cheber. He says, "Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river of Chebar: and I fell on my face." (Ezekiel 3:23). Here too he fell on his face and remained that way.

So we see that all men who experienced the manifest presence of God all fell down as dead at his presence. In the presence of God the self begins to be abased and God begins to be glorified. As he declared, "... there shall no man see me, and live." (Exodus 33:20). Yet must we come to him for in his presence the flesh starts dying truly but the spirit starts living also. Not that the flesh merely dies, rather it is killed by his presence. Dying is not what we do in his presence, it is what the presence of God does when we come into his presence. It kills the self and causes God to be magnified. We haven't seen God, been with God, or fellowshiped with him until the self begins to die. That, my brothers and sisters, is the first evidence of the manifest presence of God.

One of the problems we have in the church of today are those who want to experience God, belong to his fold, bear his name, yet don't want to die. As the singer Thomas Evans puts it:

"It seems today everyone wants to be holy,
To be pure and pleasing in your sight,
But it seems that so few wants to die to be truly born again,

To make themselves a living sacrifice."

To see God is to die, yet what a blessed death it is. So blessed that though it be death, yet must we gladly rush upon it. Charles Wesley expresses his thought on the matter this way:

Charles Wesley wrote:

"I know the terms: I cannot see
Thy blissful face, and live—in sin:
A flaming sword preserves the tree
Of life, lest self should enter in;
It keeps out self, and every way
It turns, the man of sin to slay.

Be it according to Thy Word,
Ready to meet my doom I am.
Oh! Let me rush upon that sword,
And feel the sin-consuming flame;
Live only Christ in me, not I;
O let me see Thy face and die!

Die all of self to live no more,
Die the old man no more to rise;
Me to Thine image here restore,
Receive me to Thy paradise,
(Whence I may never more remove)
The paradise of perfect love."

Revelation Of Our True Self

"When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."
(Luke 5:8)

Another impact that the presence of God has on us is that it reveals to us our true selves. This cannot be anything with a slightest semblance of a glamorous revelation for there isn't anything glorious about man. It is written of us, "out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19). The presence of God, like a clear mirror, reveals ourselves to us. The second evidence of the manifest presence is we begin to see ourselves as we truly are.

So let's go back to the man Daniel. Let us take a look at who he was. Daniel was among the most good looking men of his time. When he and his fellows arrived at Babylon as captives, Nebuchadnezzar had said that they should bring him some of the choicest children among all his captives from Israel. His criteria were these: no blemish, well favoured, skillful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, understanding science, such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace. These were the criteria of the king and when they made their search Daniel and the other three famous Hebrew children were taken. From this we know that Daniel had these qualities. These qualities expressed the entirety of all that makes a person attractive to people of every kind, age, and culture. First was the physical appearance of Daniel. Next was skilfulness, wisdom, knowledge and understanding. And lastly, character. There is no doubt that Daniel had all the reasons in the world to be proud, snobby, and pompous. He had all that made a person of high class. That was

not all. After they refused the King's meat, the Bible said about he and his friends "at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." So among the best they were superior in appearance. Further we read "the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." These children were actually ten times better than all the men of wisdom (what we'd call doctors of philosophy today though probably way superior to our doctors) of the world of that time. A time when qualifications had true meaning. I say doctors of philosophy not because doctors of philosophy should be magicians or astrologers but because those were the most learned men of the time. Even God made reference to the wisdom of Daniel in particular in Ezekiel 28:3. He and his brethren were the most good looking of all the men in all the world, and that undisputedly. These were really rare talents that should have been puffed up and magnified themselves. Such a man of excellence was Daniel. To go through all he did in his wisdom and rare understanding would be too hectic for me so I'll just stop here: I say again, such a man was Daniel.

Now it is this Daniel that saw this vision of Christ and said, "my comeliness was turned in me into corruption." This is the evidence of the manifest presence of God. Not that he became indifferent to his comeliness, or he saw it not to be as good as he used to think, but he completely abhorred himself so much that he defined his comeliness as rottenness. He didn't say I saw my comeliness as corruption but rather it was turned in me into

corruption. In the presence of the excellency of Christ all what you have and are becomes revealed to you as what they are; mere rottenness and a thing to be abhorred.

Another Character of the Bible that beheld God himself was Job, and what was his testimony about the experience? The first thing he uttered the moment he had the opportunity to speak was this, "Behold, I am vile..." (Job 40:4). The next time he spoke he said to God, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5 - 6). Job abhorred himself. He saw himself as what he was; vile and was mere dust and ashes. His true self was revealed to him in the presence of his Maker. He too had his seeming merits and godliness, but in the presence of God he declared in spite of his moral merits that he was vile. In the deadness of the self caused by the manifest presence of God, he saw himself as dust and ashes.

Though wearing the garb of flesh and his divinity was absolutely masked, yet when Peter experienced the power of Christ at work, he fell on his knees and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." (Luke 5:8). His sinfulness became so apparent at the manifestation of the power of Christ that he pleaded that Christ should depart from him.

Again Charles Wesley expresses his thoughts on the matter this way:

"O Thou, who know'st what is in man,
Who searchest out the reins and heart,
Me, Jesu, to myself explain,
A ray of heavenly light impart;
Impart Thyself, Thou real light,

And manifest my nature's night.

Cause me, O God, myself to know,
The depth of wickedness within,
Show me, my inmost substance show,
Th'exceeding sinfulness of sin:
Such power belongs to Thee alone;
Show me that sin and I are one.

Senseless alike of sin and Thee,
My unawakened soul remains
Fast bound in sin, and misery;
I slumber on, nor feel my chains,
Nor taste nor see how good Thou art,
For still the veil is on my heart.

Oh! Might my heart at last relent,
And feel the guilty mountain-load.
Oh! That Thy powerful Word might rent
The veil, and let me into God;
The glories of Thy face display,
The brightness of eternal day!"

New Life In Christ

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."
(Galatians 2:20)

We had seen that we don't merely die in the presence of God but that his presence kills us. However upon dying, we begin living by his strength and in his strength. After the apostle John fell at the feet of Christ as one dead, he said of Christ, "he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last." (Revelation 1:17). All the things he did hereafter were done in the life and strength inspired by that touch. And Daniel after falling on his face, "And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands." (Daniel 10:10). For Ezekiel it is written, "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me." (Ezekiel 2:1 - 2). And again, "Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house." (Ezekiel 3:24). As often as we behold the Lord we die that by his touch and word we may live by his Spirit so that we can literally say it is no longer I that liveth but Christ that liveth in me. Herein is another evidence of his manifest presence; the new life of Christ.

It is written, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11). The presence of God is full of joy. Indeed it kills and humbles, but when we begin to live in his strength, in the end it is full of joy and everlasting pleasures. This true joy is given to them who are abased in their own eyes. Such a joy the world cannot take away. But that which is joy that is based on mundane things, the world can take away thus this is not the joy of his presence.

Consequent Profound Humility

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live."
(Deuteronomy 8:2 - 3)

When a man, standing in God's presence, dies, when a man loses his strength and life, and hereafter begins to live a life that doesn't belong to him, and walks in the strength entirely of another, what else is left to him but to be humble. This is not meekness. Meekness is the perfection of humility and character, yet this is not meekness. For meekness is being humble despite having reasons to be proud. For example, a mighty king who has no issues dining and chatting with common beggars of the street. But what we are talking about here is being profoundly humble because of the realisation of one's nothingness, thus having no reason, no delusions of grandeur, and no excuse to be proud. The revealing presence of God makes these evidently visible. This humility is not void of some sort of humiliation. Worthy humiliation. Not one to which one is subjected to by another, but one that one is subjected to by his own realisations. So it is not meekness but profound humility. The third evidence of the manifest presence of God is profound humility.

I have noticed that many women who dress decently are those

that have nothing to show off. Those who feel they have assets to show off find it hard dressing decently. Such people, even if they find themselves in a very conservative setting, would still somehow and stubbornly wear revealing clothes. Those who are ashamed of their figure would be well clothed to ensure their poor figure is well concealed even in a loose society. For this reason everyone would mistakenly see them as virtuous. However, the day an unusual thing happens, like a strong gust of wind, it would become clear why they were always so meticulous about dressing well to conceal their form. As the pidgin Nigerian saying goes, "na the day when breeze blow na him we go know say reverend father no be small boy." That is to say, "it is on the day that breeze blows that you will know that a reverend father (a Roman catholic priest) is not a small boy." Why? Because the wind sometimes reveals what people hide under. It is at such times people would realise that why some people dress decently is not piety but because they seek to conceal what they're ashamed of.

I've seen women speak vehemently against certain types of clothing that don't look good on them which incidentally were inappropriate for women to wear. Initially I would assume that it was their commitment to Christ that made them condemn this form of dressing only for me to realise later on that it didn't look good on them anyways. Women with hairs they think are nice to behold find it hard obeying the command to cover the hair. I've seen this kind of behaviour amongst women a lot. It is a bit understandable, in the carnal sense, why people behave this way. When you have things, whether it is wealth, good spoken English and command of English, good singing voice, appealing physique, and so on, things that could win you admiration, we fall under immense pressure to show them off. That is because we have something to show off. But those who

don't have it fall under the opposite form of pressure to hide away and conceal whatever could bring contempt and ridicule by their lack. The same way it is when we are conscious of our rottenness and nothingness, we turn the eyes of others away from ourselves and would rather have them look on the excellency of Christ. Why should one who sees rottenness in himself be so eager to get attention? The man who sees the contemptibleness of his contemptible self has no choice but to be humble.

In the world this would appear as profound meekness because the man who is humble through the knowledge of his own nothingness, though he be lifted up in the eyes of the world, would remain humble, not seeing himself as the world sees him. The world therefore would wonder at such meekness. Such humility despite seemingly having reasons to be proud. Yet is it not meekness. It is way distinct from the meekness of Christ who declared, "I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matthew 11:29). For he is the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Almighty Creator, yet did he humble himself so much to put on our flesh, live in our world, and even die the shameful death of the cross for our sakes. That is the true meekness. He's humble not because though we see him as the Son of God, yet he has some deficiencies that being conscious of he becomes humble. There is no such thing with him. He is truly great and beyond great, yet truly meek and beyond meek.

When the children of Israel walked with God in the wilderness for forty years, he said he humbled them. He made them suffer and gave them food they were not accustomed to. They were made humble, they weren't meek of themselves. By the circumstances God placed them he made them humble. On our part, by the realisations we make in his presence we are made

humble.

In our walk with God, not only the aura of his presence that infuses humility in us, the very meekness of the Godhead infuses humility in us. When we observe his eternal and infinite loftiness and power and see our nothingness and weakness yet perceive how he condescends to dwell with us, it leaves us with no option but to be humble. The psalmist says, "Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth." (Psalm 113:5 - 6). And when you see his dealings with men through scriptures you will be amazed at how the high and lofty one relates so closely with men. See him talking with Abraham even to the point that he and his wife laughed finding his words funny. Listen to him talking with Moses at the burning bush trying to convince Moses to go back into Egypt. See him talking with Samuel and all the great prophets. Then see him expire on the cross for mere man. Relating with such excellent meekness would definitely infuse his humility into you. The man who walks with God will be conscious of the fact that if the infinitely high one would be humble to walk with him, then he has no reason to be proud. Walking with God and being proud simultaneously is like swimming and being dry simultaneously. It doesn't just happen.

In these things we ought to first judge ourselves to see if indeed we are experiencing the manifest presence of God. Just as the actual bodily revelation of Christ has on the beholder the effect of killing the flesh, the realisation of one's nothingness, the new life in Christ, and consequent profound humility, so does the presence of his which we feel as our spirit communes with him in the place of prayer and personal devotion. As we walk with him day by day, we find these same marks as the evidence of

his manifest presence. The end product of profound humility is the one special mark by which we know that indeed we are walking with God and thus experiencing his manifest presence.

The Right Reverend Bedell wrote, "Evidence of piety is not so much to be sought in high emotions of any kind, as in real humility..." There's almost nothing else that shows piety as much as humility does.

As these serve as evidences by which we check our walk with God, it requires sincerity as we examine ourselves with these yardsticks. Remember we had said much earlier, "The profession of our faith must be in sincerity." And, "insincerity, if allowed to be, shall pose a major militating factor against our walk with God." And Christ said, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:1). An honest and good heart is essential if we are to have a successful walk with God. So in this aspect of examining ourselves for these marks of the evidence of God's manifest presence, utmost sincerity is required in knowing the state of our walk with God.

So how is your walk with God? Are you full of yourself? Do you live abundantly in the flesh and move with your strength? Do you see yourself as deserving glory and seek to bring glory to your rottenness, dust, and ashes? Or do you acknowledge your nothingness and are contrite in dust and ashes? Do you, in the presence of the Holy One, realise your exceeding sinfulness? Does the weight of his presence drain the strength you thought was great? Have you lost your life and begin to live anew in the life and strength of Christ, being conscious that nothing that you are is yours but is entirely of Christ?

Examine yourself and see. As you know this is a performance check of progress and not of accomplishment. So it is quite impossible that anyone would score a hundred percent. However that may be, we must also understand the essence of the examination. It is for further progress. As we had said, following the business principle of PDCA. This is the checking phase and it ought to be followed by act. At every point you see traces of ego, of your being unconscious of your rottenness and nothingness to start being so deluded as to be seeking to bring glory to your dust and ashes, you should know that your walk with God isn't so great. Your devotion and walk with God ought to lead you to the point where you're crucified with Christ.

These examinations also apply to our corporate Christian meetings. If all we have after our meetings are just excitements and self consciousness, then we haven't enjoyed the riches of his presence. All we have done is to meet just as every other club or social group meets. They sing, they donate and give to those in need, but God is absent. Such social groups or clubs aren't bad though. I do go to some myself. Particularly literary groups and I find them to be enlightening. Not that alone, it is a ripe ground to propagate and defend right values. But to reduce our Christian gatherings to a social club would be outrightly disgraceful. We ought to meet, not with men alone, but with God as it is written, "... truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3). It is foolishness when we hold our meetings in ways that banish God from our midsts. God will not dwell amongst any who has the self as a rival to him. God must be all in all if he must fellowship with us. How can people be full of themselves and be so self conscious and say God is in their midst? Profound humility must characterise our gathering together. What ought to characterise our gathering as Christians is not just that God ought to be

glorified above all but that he be glorified and the self be given its rightful place of insignificance.

When we also look at the manner of men who lead the churches of today, we can be certain that they've scarcely been in the presence of God. One major factor in people founding a church is because they want to be all in all in their churches. It should be all about them. When men want to found a church and start a ministry, instead of spending whole nights in prayer, fasting, and earnestly seeking the face of God for strength to serve him and do everything for his glory, the way Christ prayed all night before he chose his disciples, the very first thing they do is to first of all go to a photo studio. Why? To take highly professional photos of themselves that will bring honour and glory to their dust and ashes. Then they print fliers and banners and other printables with the photos all over. The emphasis on themselves just shows that such people are carnal.

Others will display a pretended humility but still show how proud and vain they are. I sometimes read some daily devotionals and other texts written by modern preachers and the vanity I see is alarming. Some devotionals are just full of self praise and very little teaching. Others are just full of marketing texts for their church "brand." Others still will be thwarting gospel truths just to inspire admiration for their position as a pastor. To make men think they were so great and magnificent.

Today there is a nonsensical "gospel" music in which some guys sing a song that among other nonsenses says something like, "this is the age of fine boys that love Jesus." By that they're referring to themselves. I heard the song and was shocked at the new grade A madness we have just arrived at. What makes the crappy singers think they were fine boys? A man goes to the

barber's shop and with the clipper they shape his hair so badly that his head begins to look like the butt of a pencil, and cut lines in the hair as if a worm has eaten its way through the hair, then with that haggard and beggared look go to the studio to call themselves fine boys that love Jesus. The meek and lowly Jesus. What level of self deceit and vanity can move people to sing such about themselves? When Daniel, the finest and wisest man of the entire world of his time, in all his affluence and majestic splendour, when this Daniel stood before the Christ, he confessed that his comeliness became in him like rottenness. Then who are these male hags that call themselves fine boys that love Jesus?

Apart from examining ourselves for the marks of God's manifest presence, we ought to also look for the marks of the evidence of the manifest presence of God in those by whom we seek to be taught about God. How can a man who does not know God teach about him? They shall not fail to present a distorted idol to their hearers and erroneously call him God. And doing this they shall pull men away from God while supposing that they are declaring him, for if you are taught by men who are distant from God they will turn your back against his word. If for example you are taught by such people who, being distant from God, are so far from him, are so obsessed with themselves, start to sing their praises, because you take them as teachers you'd begin to forget the commands of scriptures that forbids such behaviour. If a man tells you how much and how well he fasts and how people sing his praise that he fasts a lot, you'll begin to forget that Christ commanded saying, "when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:17 - 18). So, Christ says not even our behaviour

should inform others that we are fasting, yet if we continue to listen to such people trying to teach and go against the direct command, it won't be long before we would either forget entirely the command of Christ or we would fail to understand it though we keep it in memory. We too would start seeing it as okay to tell people when we fast. And how rife it has become now for Christians to do the evil of letting people know when they fast and seek praise from men the way a child seeks praise by trying to spell complex words to an adult when no one asked him to. You'd hear a Christian man say with a hungry face, "I am not sure I can come for that program, you know this our twenty one days' fasting won't allow me to come."

The man that is truly spiritual and has enjoyed the richness of his manifest presence will say with John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30). The fact that we have most preachers seeking self glorification is an evidence that they have not stepped half a foot into the manifest presence of God. And this fact is also manifest in the kind of lopsided Christians they produce, the level of schism revolving, the errors and hypocrisy rife everywhere, clear evidences of greed. All these things don't spring from the knowledge of God. These things are inimical to God. How then is it so rife in the people who seek to teach the ways of God? Christ says, "... the tree is known by his fruit." (Matthew 12:33). When the fruit is bad, the tree is obviously bad. Thinking our dust and ashes is worthy of honour and even worship is delusion and blindness which clears away the more we enter into God's manifest presence. If the church must know good days of great revival the men who lead her must of necessity be men who live daily in the manifest presence of God.

Moses experienced richly the manifest presence of God and was

declared the meekest man on earth. Peter too was exceedingly meek, and so were the other disciples. I wrote in more detail about the meek life of Moses and apostle Peter in my article, "THE COST OF POWER." Meekness is a mark seen in everyone who has spent time in the presence of God and seeing this one mark in them all, we know that meekness is the evidence of being in the manifest presence of God. And seeing it is the evidence of being in the manifest presence of God, we must look for this mark in ourselves and those who seek to lead the church. Ensuring those who occupy leadership positions in the church have this one mark will purge church leadership from a lot of evil workers.

As a way of suggesting, seeing the level of compromise, pride, arrogance, and all that characterises the average modern day pastor, lest you starve spiritually I'd recommend you also download old time sermons and listen to them from time to time. Also get books of great Christians of the past and study them. The more you hear the poison of today the more you need to listen to the antidotes of the past. This has really worked for me. Books of the past have been a source of personal revivals to me. You'd see in ages gone by men who see in themselves nothing but dust and ashes, and remind you that you are dust and ashes too. And realising this, most other things fall into proper perspectives. Their doctrines, testimony, and life would keep you in constant reminder of God's commands rather than having the damnable effect of making you forget the commands of God.

As said, the level of realisation we have about our nothingness and the consequent humility we possess is a measure of how much of God's presence we enjoy. We must progress in humility and we can't be perfect. I who speak these things am not worthy

to write or recommend it to others on account of the fact that I too know how prone I am to seeking glory for myself. In acts of which I think I'm being humble, I know I am still prone to wanting the glory of being known as "the humble one." Being self seeking is a malady which only the manifest presence of God can cure. The more time we spend with him, the better for us and the church.

In Psalm 113:6, it is written of God, "Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" When we spend time with our humble Maker, his humility of necessity rubs off on us.

Frances Ridley Hevergal, who composed the hymn "TRUEHEARTED, WHOLEHEARTED, FAITHFUL AND LOYAL" which as we had seen earlier was the hymn of the sisters' union of her time, was a lady who enjoyed the presence of God to a high degree. She remained unmarried due to her love for God. She said marriage would be a distraction despite having many proposing to her. Her contemporaries said that if she steps into a room, you'd have the full consciousness that two people stepped into the room, she and the Holy Spirit. This is unlike the lies people tell of some other so-called women of power. They said of one that one day she was passing and the glasses of windows got shattered. Those are not marks of the Holy Ghost. They show lying wonders yet live in disobedience to the word of God preaching where the voice of woman ought not to be heard. However, our sister here showed she enjoyed the presence of God in her profound humility. Taking a look at her hymns and her life, self was completely out of her way. She was fully focused on the Saviour. Many things she wrote in this hymn but self was never exalted but always abased. She wrote in one of the verses:

"Truehearted! Savior, Thou knowest our story,
Weak are the hearts that we lay at Thy feet,
Sinful and treacherous! yet, for Thy glory,
Heal them, and cleanse them from sin and deceit."

Such were the words of a lady that fellowshipped with God. Not a trace of self exaltation but all she could see in the self were short comings and followed by passionate prayers for God's help. She didn't lack the vocabulary to direct praise to the self, you'd only have to see the other verses and her other hymns to know how rich her vocabulary was when she writes of Christ the Saviour. Yet not a word of praise to the self. None other of the people who drew close to God and fellowshipped richly with him were full of the self. None. They all had a self that was abased and a God that is exalted. Such is the effect of the manifest presence of God.

I often see posts from time to time on social media of something titled "WHEN WOMEN PRAY INTERNATIONAL." Then you see women gather with all their artificial things to "pray." The very name reflects gender based pomposity and a high view of the female gender. A false notion that when the female gender prays greater things happen. Very strange and I can't think of what could have led to such a level of delusion. If the name be so reflective of delusions of grandeur, I wonder what the meetings would be like. This is what happens when people try to be spiritual without stepping a foot into the presence of God. Like someone wanting to be a scholar without reading. Just like a local, trying to sound scholarly, referring to a fellow local saying, "my fellow expatriate." This he said because lacking the knowledge of what the word means, he thought the word expatriate referred to experts. My late dad also used to tell us an

amusing story of someone who was asked, "what is the meaning of eyesore?" And his response was, "eyesore means something that you witnessed with your eyes." As in "eye-saw." All these absurdities emanate from people trying to be scholarly without studies. Greater absurdities emanate from people trying to be spiritual without seeking after God and living in his presence. Absurdities like the weaker vessels of dust and ashes thinking so highly of themselves as to think their prayers have special powers. "WHEN WOMEN PRAY."

I was reading once about an old time Christian women's movement which was named, "TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT," that is a more noble name for a Christian women's movement. Nothing heady, nothing vain. Just a simple declaration of purpose. Every trace of Christian endeavour, if it be truly Christian, must have clear marks of absolute humility and not even a trace of pomposity. Anything short of it is enmity with God and must of necessity work to an anti-Christian end.

Coming to God for an intimate relationship by which we may know him, experience his manifest presence, and be truly spiritual, is not what the carnal man wishes to do. I had said that carnality and the love of this world is the reason why many would not wish to come to Christ, sharing my own conversion experience how that I kept back from coming to Christ as long as I didn't want to give up the things I loved, and only came to him out of the fear of hell. Many are held back from coming to Christ because of carnality, yet they are able to look spiritual enough to gain acceptance and ascend the church hierarchical structure. Yet as the Bible puts it, "he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man." (1 Corinthians 2:15). They who have been in God's presence and felt its transforming power and humbling effect can easily see the

absurdity of the carnal man trying to look and sound spiritual, for he is able to judge all things.

So we must know that the foolishness of vanity and pride is a clear mark that one doesn't dwell with God. No matter the show of spirituality, if it is void of profound humility, it is not spiritual.

The Blessedness Of The Blessed Suicide

"... and to die is gain."
(Philippians 1:21)

The prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi, who knew what dying and the benefit of dying was, goes:

"Oh, divine master,
Grant that I may not so much as seek to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love,
For it is in giving that we recieve,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is dying to the self that we are born to eternal life."

That sums it all up. It is in dying to the self that we are born to eternal life. The reason why the church has been very ineffective is because it is too lively. It is alive and not dead thus we see little of the true liveliness of Christ. If we are to witness great revivals and the continual manifest presence of God in our

midsts then each and every person, from the pulpit to the pew, must personally walk with God in understanding and simplistic obedience, and thus experience his manifest presence which will have the effect of killing the flesh, revealing our true self to us, and consequently make us profoundly humble.

Prayer: Dear Lord and God, help us to walk with you in understanding simplistic obedience. As we walk in your presence, reveal our true self to us which shall have the effect of making us profoundly humble. Teach us to examine ourselves continually tracing the marks of the evidence of your manifest presence in our lives. And by this make good progress in our walk with you. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 37: REVERENCE, FEAR, AND TERROR

"Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."
(Isaiah 8:13)

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake."
(Hebrews 12:21)

"... with God is terrible majesty."
(Job 37:22)

We've all heard the saying, "familiarity breeds contempt." Do we then have contempt for God when we dwell in his presence and become familiar? No, it is when we try to know God without dwelling in his presence that we become overfamiliar and contempt begins to breed. If you know God by dwelling in his presence what results is deep reverence for him, fear, and terror, not contempt. No man ever came into the presence of God and began to have contempt for him.

Familiarity breeds contempt when we begin to become familiar with fellow men only because the closer we get to a person the more we see their inadequacies. From afar we may perceive a man to be a demigod, but when we come closer to him we will

realise he's no demigod but a mere man with human frailties. When men see another rich but on coming close realise he's in a financial strait with his family, sensible but on coming close realise he's not so sensible, moral but on coming close realise he's not so moral, and other like realisations, these breed contempt. Even though it may seem as though familiarity itself is what breeds contempt, the truth is that this contempt is scarcely free from coming to the knowledge of the flaws in him with whom we have become familiar. Even if it is not related to inadequacies, it may just be that what we realise doesn't align with our tastes or preferences. And lastly the mere fact that we have been able to comprehend and size up someone, having demystified the unknown things about the person may also breed contempt.

Another reason why people become overfamiliar with a familiarity that breeds contempt is when they are more conscious of the faults of others when they see them than on their own faults. Because if one is conscious of his own faults he won't despise others on account of their faults. But because men are usually blind to their faults they despise others when they come close enough to see their faults and inadequacies. This phenomenon breeds worse contempt when the person in question is pompous and has, through pretence, presented himself to the world as a demigod. When people then realise that this demigod is nothing but a contemptible man it breeds much contempt.

Christ too suffered contempt on account of overfamiliarity. It is written, "And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto

him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus, said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." (Mark 6:1 - 4). Jesus clearly informs us here that overfamiliarity does breed contempt. The only place mentioned by Christ where a prophet is without honour are places where he's familiar to people. His country, his kin, and his house. But elsewhere where he isn't familiar he is with honour. The mere question, "is not this the carpenter?" shows to what degree he was commonised by his own. Did he not do miracles to certify his doctrine? He did. Were they not aware? They were. They saw the power of God at work in him so much that they asked, "what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?" Yet it was not enough to prevent the contempt that naturally comes with overfamiliarity. This didn't just breed contempt but anger followed too, for they were offended at him. And when he continued speaking this anger boiled over that they wanted to throw him down a cliff headlong and so destroy him. All these because they were familiar with him.

Elsewhere it is written, "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (John 6:42). Because they knew him, his family and his childhood they couldn't accord him the worship he deserved. Again, that mere question, "is not this Jesus?" was designed to commonise him. They knew him and his father, mother, brothers, sisters and all. This time they were angry that he claimed to have come down from heaven.

The problem with these people is that they knew Christ's childhood but were blind and inattentive to the truth about his birth. Those who had waited for the kingdom knew right early that Christ was a special child and we know that the news of his birth was well reported far and wide for concerning his birth it is written, "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." (Matthew 2:3). And again, "And when they [the shepherds] had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." (Luke 2:17). So his birth and the wonder of it was well known but these evidently didn't know of his virgin birth and so asked, "how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?"

In today's world also, a glance at the professing Christians and preachers of the day would reveal that men can become overfamiliar with God. The very nonchalance we experience in the church is the evidence of this. Many preachers have a lackadaisical approach to leadership of the flock of Christ which Christ died for. In that Christ died for his flock, to have a lackadaisical approach to tending his sheep is to take his blood to be of little value, yet they treat the feeding of their souls as a light thing. I've written a number of times how A.W. Tozer lamented that due to preachers doing a poor job the children of the Father starve to death while sitting at their Father's table. Some sermons I hear make me wonder why I even came to church. Just random beating around the bush and spiritualising it with occasional quotes from scriptures, and they call that a sermon. All these speak of irreverence for God whose house the preachers attend to, for the man who has reverence for God would be meticulous about the service they render to him and to his children. They seem to have known God too well that he seemed to have lost his reverence.

The members of the church also come to church without any sense of reverence for God. They dress anyhow, talk anyhow and behave anyhow. I don't expect to find more reverence for God in members than in their pastors. Sometimes I see members talking to each other in church even while a preacher is speaking, and that is not good. But who cautions the preacher not to preach heresy or profitless sermons on the pulpit. For if there is no reverence for God on the pulpit, it means it would be futile to seek reverence on the pews.

Someone I know who was tired at the level of overfamiliarity with God in the church said, "Christians who were born in the church are the problem of the church." This he alleged because he found more devotion in people who had on their own converted to the faith than people who were raised as Christians. This may be true and there are good reasons why that could be the case. They've grown up in the church, went through the Sunday school, known John 3:16, they can answer basic questions in the Bible, known all about the church system, and all these to impress their parents, and not necessarily for the fear and honour of God. So there's nothing new to know about God. But those who got converted themselves have personally made that choice and thus know why they made it, they did in spite of contrary consequences and so have a strong resolve in their pursuit of God, and not doing these merely to please parents or get approval from the members of the church to seek God truly. Secondly, they aren't familiar with the church system. So they don't have that "overfamiliarity" with God. So people do have that sense of overfamiliarity with God and that breeds contempt too. If ever there were any form of reverence, it erodes it.

Does that therefore mean that walking with God and intimacy would breed contempt? No, rather when we walk with God it results in reverence, fear, and terror. It is when we know too much of God and his ways from afar it breeds contempt for him. When we look at the people who, in Bible days, despised Christ, we notice one thing with them. They all didn't know him. They knew his humanity but not his divinity. And when you know the humanity of Christ you know nothing about him. If you knew his father, mother, siblings, and all, but don't know his heavenly Father, you know nothing of his origin.

They who knew him and walked with him had an entirely different view from these men. His blessed disciples walked with but these others didn't. He grew by them but they merely knew about him and didn't know him. When you compare those who walked with Christ and those who didn't work with him and observe their disposition towards him, it would be easy to tell where the problem lies. Those who walked with him honoured him so much they would not leave him. They loved him so much they were willing to die for him. Yet those who didn't walk with him despised him.

If for example these who didn't walk with him had been with him on the mount of transfiguration and seen him in his glory, their opinion of him would have been different. They wouldn't have doubted when he said to them that he came down from above. And this ignorance, being distant from him and merely knowing him from afar, made them despise him and even built up to murderous anger. It is those who don't walk with God and yet suppose they know him that have contempt for his ways.

In every age, knowing about Christ yet not knowing him in person, always leads to contempt in one degree or the other. No

man ever knew God well or how to relate with him until they had stepped into his presence. So relying on others to teach you about God without drawing close to him personally would not lead you to reverence for God but to overfamiliarity over time.

In our days, we see all manner of irreverent acts being done by preachers of the gospel. This is because there are multiple ways invented to help people to know about God but how to know him is but one. Jesus says no one can come to him except the Father draws him. No matter the things invented by men, no one can draw near to Christ except the Father draws them.

People go to Bible schools, go through the program, they pour different doctrines into their heads, and after a period they are ordained and become preachers. So pastoral ministry is just another career. People go to institutions to learn about God the way people go to institutions to learn other professions. And when they're through they are bestowed with titles of vanity. I wrote at length about the absurdity of this system in my article titled, "THE SIN OF JEROBOAM." I also wrote about it in my article titled, "STRANGE ANGELS OF SEMINARIAN ORIGIN."

Such people after all their vocational studies of God realise that there is a striking difference between them and those who proclaimed the word of God in Bible days. They realise they have no power, no revelation, no doctrine, and no divine approval. They then try to look spiritual by using casual terms for God as though using casual terms for someone is a mark of closeness to them. Not even sensible people in relating with mere men use casual terms on one another. But somehow some people do. In Nigeria you'd see people calling their close friends, "this idiot." In other parts of the world females call themselves bitches as a friendly way of referring to themselves so much that

bitch in a Longman Dictionary I once used was defined as a friendly word to refer to a woman. So when you aren't close she is referred to as madam, but when you become close she is referred to as a female dog. It takes fools to exhibit this level of idiocy in the way they refer to others even when they're dealing with fellow dust and ashes. What blasphemous madness would lead men to try to commonise God this way and see it as a mark of closeness to him. At one time we used to hear things like, "speak to the guy up there." As though speaking this way about God shows you're near to him or that the members would feel a sense of closeness to God when they refer to God this way. So when he's far away he's the Great and Mighty One, but when we come close he becomes "the guy up there." All these are completely stupid and to allow these stupidity into our relationship with God is nothing short of blasphemy. Contempt for God breeds when it becomes a mark of spirituality to commonise God.

When we use the notions we have about human relationships to define how we ought to relate with God it breeds contempt. This also results from knowing God from afar. To this kind of foolishness, late Dr. Selwyn Hughes responded, "could Moses being in presence of God say he trembles and exceedingly shake, only to come down and refer to God as "the guy up there...?"" It isn't possible. Such foolish ways of referring to God is a proof that one is distant from God.

It breeds contempt for God when we take his mercy for granted. To sin wilfully in spite of God's command to be holy first is an act of contempt and it also breeds contempt for God. The fact that God does not deal a heavy blow on sinners upon sinning makes the sinner despise his command and continue in sin thinking, "naa, nothing bad will happen to me for my sins." But

this is God merely being merciful and a sinner acting this way in response is taking him for granted.

But they who know God for themselves all have one trait, they are filled with reverence, fear and terror. Jacob, witnessing the manifest presence of God for himself, was filled with terror. It is written, "And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:17). He called the presence of God a dreadful place.

It is written, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Hebrews 12:28). The reason why it is godly fear is not that it is free of terror but because it is not such as draw men away from God the way Adam fled from God. The presence of God may be dreadful, yet men who experience it crave for it. As we have seen in the chapter, "THE AGONY OF THE PASSING PRESENCE."

Some try to say that the fear we have for God is a reverential fear. That is the fear of not wanting to go against the will of one we love. So that is fear based on love, but the fear that his presence inspires is a fear of terror. There is definitely that fear of love, but that which supersedes all those is the fear of terror that he with whom you're relating with is a consuming fire.

Richard of St. Victor spoke at length on this terror (calling it dread) at length in his treatises. He wrote:

"The ghostly [that is spiritual] experience of the proof of this working standeth all in a reverent affection that a man hath to God in the time of his prayer, caused of this dread in the

ground of this work, and of this stirring of love, the which is brought in by the ghostly steps of this staff hope, touched before. For why, reverence is nought else but dread and love medled together with a staff of certain hope...

"Me thinketh that saint Bernard accordeth to this working, where he saith that all things should be done swiftly and gladly. And see why: swiftly for dread, and gladly for hope, and lovely trust in His mercy."

Reverence cannot be without terror. Even when we reverence our parents, that reverence is not devoid of terror. The fear of being thrashed made us reverence them. We didn't reverence them just because we knew they provided for us and protected us and so loved them. Back in the days many of us didn't even know what it takes for parents to provide for the home. A child could as well think parents go to work just to gather money in a bag and come back home. They don't realise how much pain they go through to make money upon which the home survives. Sometimes children also tend to compare their parents by what others have. If they walk to school and some other school mates ride in a car to school, or if they had meals that aren't as good as what their friends have, they could feel their parents didn't provide for them as they should just because they wished not to. So based on the many ignorances that cloud the minds of children many times parents go without the love and appreciation they deserve. Though love being kept from parents by the cloud of ignorance, parents would still enjoy absolute reverence when they do thrash children for wrongdoing. When a child has a father that thrashes for wrongdoing, he cannot fail but reverence him.

The bane of many policies of some western countries is that they

actively ensure that parents can't thrash their children for wrong doings. This removes the terror for parents from children. The consequence is manifest. Children become rude to parents and everyone else. Over time the same poorly bred children have hatched the cockatrice egg of woke culture, cancel culture, and the likes. Nations that swallow it in acceptance die, and those who try to suppress it and crush it find it break out into a viper of stiff rebellion. As I've said in my book titled, "THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN HOME," that thrashing is essential for bringing up children, especially boys.

So, reverence, fear and terror, are the fourth evidence manifest presence of God. The degree of reverence, fear and terror of God we feel is directly proportional to how much and well we walk with him.

What we've been saying in essence is the only time people who tend to be spiritual and still have contempt for the things of God is when people don't go into the presence of God and yet wish to know God and relate with him from afar. Trying to know God without true spirituality. The truly spiritual man will truly know God and have deep reverence for him. The lack of experience of the manifest presence of God is what breeds contempt. Intimacy with God means deeper reverence, not irreverence. If your so called intimacy with God brings over familiarity, it is not in his presence you've been in. No one comes into the presence of his Eternal Majesty and thinks lightly of him. Awe and reverence must fill the heart of him that comes into the presence of God.

In all our walk with God therefore, we must watch against contempt and overfamiliarity with God. We must get rid of everything that breeds these things, particularly sin. It drives his presence away from us and contempt begins to breed. Let's

approach God truly and walk with him steadily, and in his manifest presence our hearts shall be filled with deep reverence, fear, and terror. Where we find ourselves beginning to have that sense of overfamiliarity with God and for his ways and that the reverence for him is beginning to fade away, we can be sure that our walk with him is not right. There are things to amend and repent of. Let's search our hearts and may God reveal ourselves to us. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to examine my heart and see if I truly reverence you. Reveal myself to me. Help me to make amends where amendments are required and help me to repent where repentance is required. Help me to always return to my first love. Draw me into your presence that inspires reverence for you, fear of you, and terror in your presence. This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 38: HOLINESS

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."
(1 Thessalonians 4:7)

Now we shall talk on holiness as the fifth evidence of the manifest presence of God. Holiness flows naturally from a true reverence, fear, and terror of God. The dread of God makes a man holy. The man therefore whose life has no marks of holiness should not think that all his religious activities, however religious they may be, means he is walking with God. The man who walks with God must be holy for his very presence makes holy.

It is written in Exodus 29:43, "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory." Just as the glory of God which is his manifest presence made the tabernacle holy so also does his manifest presence make our earthly tabernacle, which is our body, holy. His presence sanctifies. It makes holy. The man to whom his presence is manifest becomes holy.

So what is this holiness? My dictionary does a fair work in telling us about holiness. It says holiness is a state of being morally and spiritually excellent. Of all the definitions this came closest. Though other definitions are also good, when you bring God into the equation it doesn't balance out so well. For

whatever definition we have of being holy must define God too for he says, "... be holy, for I am holy." (Leviticus 11:45). In him we find the definition of holiness. Any definition of holiness therefore that doesn't define God is but a faulty definition of holiness. For example in presenting holiness as a state of being devoted to the service of God, since God is God it is awkward to say he's devoted to the service of himself. While it is okay to use the word holy to mean devoted to the service of God for non-human entities, like we have the holy Bible, the holy church, definitions such as this won't serve our purpose in this discussion. But unlike that we know that God is both morally and spiritually excellent, so that would be better yet not best.

God wants us to be devoted to him, sanctified, and set apart for his service, but those don't define holiness. God-likeness is holiness. Herein is the perfect definition of holiness. Does that mean we should be almighty, omnipresent, omniscient, and all? No, for God has two categories of his attributes namely, moral attributes and active attributes. We can possess his moral attributes such as kindness, love, truthfulness, humility, and all. But we can't possess his active attributes such as his almightiness, omnipresence, omniscience, and all. The call to be holy is a call to possess his moral attributes not to possess his powers.

So we are to be excellent in morals and the reverence, fear, and terror of God is the propelling factor in this. Sadly, some people try to be holy because of their church, pastor, teacher, or parent. Trying to be moral to gain approval is not holiness. But he that will be truly holy must be driven into a holy life being propelled by the reverence, fear, and terror of God. And this we get when we step into his presence and become intimate with him. It's a natural consequence of it. The closer we get the

holier we become.

There's something about holiness that people often don't realise which would be good to point out before we move on. Holiness as we have said, is all about being morally and spiritually excellent but it doesn't just end there. There's another sense of the word. I first got this understanding from a sermon by A.W. Tozer in which he defines holiness saying, "It is a sense of awareness of the other world, a mysterious quality and difference that has come to rest upon some men - that is a holiness. Now, if a man should have that sense and not be morally right, then I would say that he is experiencing a counterfeit of the devil." I totally agree. When we are holy, there's this awareness that envelopes us. And truly, sometimes this awareness is so strong that this present life even seems to us like a dream being deemed by the consciousness of eternity. And as within us there is the awareness of another world, so also outwardly we begin to radiate a mysterious glory that is not of this world.

A.W. Tozer gave an example of Moses saying, "remember that Moses possessed these marks and qualities when he came down from the mount. He had been there with God 40 days and 40 nights - and when he came back everyone could tell where he had been. The lightning still played over his countenance, the glory of the Presence remained. This strange something which men cannot pin down or identify was there." We see such radiance in holy men repeating a number of times in the Bible.

It is written in Mark 9:14-15, "And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him." Haven't they seen Jesus before? What was it that

made them amazed? It was that mysterious something about him because he had just come out from the presence of God that the people felt that made them amazed, and as Tozer said, it was a "strange something which men cannot pin down or identify" that made them amazed. The marks of being in the presence of God remained on him.

Also, when he set his face to go to Jerusalem, there was also this strange something about him. He didn't have any tag on himself by which people would know his intention, but it is written, "And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem." (Luke 9:52 - 53). What was it about his face? I can't tell but it sure seemed like it was that mysterious something.

God placed a mark upon Cain, though this was for his evil deed. It is written, "And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." (Genesis 4:15). What mark did God set on Cain? I don't think it was an inscription on his forehead that said something like, "don't kill this guy, okay?" I believe it was probably an unseen mark that on beholding him you'd just not want to kill him. The negative form of that mysterious something. Something that on sighting him you won't have the will to harm him. That was for Cain. However, holiness on the other hand is a God-like mark on us. If we are his we ought to have his marks.

It was written of Stephen the protomartyr, "And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." (Acts 6:15). The aura of his holiness

was so obvious that though a man his face appeared to them as though it was the face of an angel.

So holiness also entails carrying about in our bodies the aura of God's glory that is perceptible to men, but is what they can't point at. Even in a school or uniformed agency with everyone dressing alike, yet if a Christian should be in their midst, there should be this something that should inform people that this one is different. When I say uniform I mean that he or she is not even distinguished by clothing as in modest clothing. Of course our modesty should distinguish us from the world, yet even when all men alike dress uniformly, there should still be this something that differentiates us from the world.

Ravi Zacharias of blessed memory told a story of meeting a man he had met and whose son came to know the Lord through him [Ravi]. When he spoke with the man, the man said about his son, "something has changed about him." His name was the same, appearance and all, but there was that something that was evident in the boy or young man. But a more striking story was that which he gave of his dad's conversion. He said, talking of his conversion, “I sit here with a humble heart telling you when I saw what happened to me, I thought it was dramatic. When I saw what happened to my father… if you knew my dad, you’d wagered your life it will never happen. My wife, at my dad’s funeral, looked at the photographs in the room in the funeral parlour, she said, “looking at these photographs I can tell you when he came to know the Lord.”” She merely saw photographs, not hearing his words as to whether or not they had become polite, not seeing his conduct as to whether or not it had become more courtly. But just from his photos she could tell by that mysterious yet conspicuous something that he was a changed man at one point. To this Ravi said, “it changes you on

the inside, it changes you on the outside. I present that Jesus to you who will bring you hope, meaning, and eternal life.”

Samuel Rutherford agreed with this when he wrote, "We smell of the smoke of this lower house of the earth, because our hearts and our thoughts are here. If we could haunt up with God, we should smell of heaven and of our country above; and we should look like our country, and like strangers, or people not born or brought up hereaway.” Let's smell of heaven and look like strangers here. That mysterious something that stands us out is holiness.

As said even if a Christian were in uniforms and standing with his uniformed colleagues, there should be that mysterious something that there's something different about him. As men saw on the face of Christ that he looked like he was going to Jerusalem, let it be conspicuous on our faces that when men should look at us we should look like we are on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem. We should be holy and look holy as the king of heaven, our homeland, is holy. Let his marks of ownership be on us. This will happen to us naturally when we dwell in his presence.

Without this holiness it is not possible to see God in the flesh and eternity. It is written, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14). Without holiness it is impossible to see God. There are often many ways in which people try to downplay the importance of holiness and try to pop other things up as a replacement. People would sometimes focus on the grace and forgiveness of God instead of focusing on the command to be holy.

Others even dwell on mere outward manifestations of holiness without reference to the real holiness that starts from within. Some take all of holiness to be just speaking in tongues (which we have spoken about that it is mostly counterfeited these days), politeness and niceness, or even decent dressing, which things are good when done in truth. They will exhibit these outward show of what can be termed holiness, but you need to hear some of those who perfect this art of outward holiness pour out lies in such an awful way. Their lies could make a fried fish shed tears. You need to see them cheat and do all manner of dishonest things. Such schemes are of the Devil and they have always plagued the church. Such pretentious outward show of holiness are, in the words of Tozer, counterfeits of the Devil, just as idolatry is the counterfeit of the worship of the One, True, and Living God.

In every age the Devil always tries to provide counterfeits of holiness to the body of Christ to keep them from the real thing. In his very insightful and devout book, "PIERS PLOWMAN" by William Langland narrated the tales of a dreamer in which he says, “the dreamer awoke, and mused on the valuelessness in the Day of Doom of the pope's pardons, indulgences, and penances, compared with a holy Christian life.” At his time, the pope's pardons, indulgences, and penances were the things fabricated of the Devil to take place of a holy Christian life, yet in that day of doom, at a time when there's nothing that can done about it, the unfortunate man begins to realise the profitlessness of all these counterfeits. As William Langland warned men of his time of these counterfeits, we must be warned of the counterfeits of our days.

Samuel Rutherford lamented, “Either I know not what Christianity is, or we have stinted a measure of so many ounce

weights, and no more, upon holiness." If holiness is not the top priority in any life or assembly it is not Christian. A Christian life or assembly places an extremely high importance on holiness. As long as we have the Devil in the world, counterfeits of holiness shall always be in ample supply. But in the day of doom, all observances and human traditions and activities shall not avail anything. Only true holiness will. The Christian man therefore needs to be cautious.

As we walk with God we must look out for the traits of true holiness and not counterfeit holiness. Walking with God produces genuine holiness so much that we can't fail but spot the counterfeits when we see them. But we on our part must measure our progress with God by our holiness. And when we see marks that holiness is lacking with the true holiness we should know that either we have left God or he has left us, and begin to seek reconciliation by self examination and repentance at every point we discover something in our lives is amiss or against his will.

So, the third evidence is holiness, both in being morally and spiritually excellent and possessing that mysterious something that radiates about us because we smell of home. Possessing that mysterious something is not our making, but it is still good to know about it as it makes one of the evidences of being in the manifest presence of God.

May God help us to be God-like in every way in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you who commanded us to be holy on the grounds that you yourself are holy, help us to be truly holy from within. Help us to trace your holiness in our lives and

where it is lacking reveal to us the cause and grant us repentance true and deep so that we may be reconciled to you our holy Lord and Master. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 39: TRUE WORSHIP

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."
(John 4:23 - 24)

"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."
(Philippians 3:3)

We shall talk now of worship. Another evidence of the manifest presence of God is true worship. When we stand in God's manifest presence, it is only then we shall be able to truly worship him. Not only do we have the ability to worship him truly, but being in his presence naturally makes us worship him, and that in truth.

Let's look at some definitions of worship before we go deeper into this chapter. Worship is the expression of reverence, love and adoration for God.

Worship is also defined by the dictionary to be "reverent honor and homage paid to God or a sacred personage, or to any object regarded as sacred." Thus what worship means may differ from person to person but what the true worship of the living God is

does not vary from person to person. It's either you are worshiping or not. People from other religions will have a different understanding in regards to the worship of their deity. It depends on what is their acceptable mode of worship which of course is none of our business and should have no influence on our understanding of worship. For the Most High God, however, there are forms of worship that are not acceptable to him. It doesn't matter what you think or what the popular opinion is, the true worship of God can't vary.

Rev. Dr. Charles Osueke of blessed memory said, "True worship begins by beholding him that is seated on the throne." How true. How do you worship one whom you have not seen? When Moses went up to Sinai and saw the glory and majesty of God and heard his wondrous qualities, it is written of him, "And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped." (Exodus 34:8). That beholding of his excellent majesty must of necessity precede a true worship of him. Not that we must mount up Sinai, but we come to him through his word and finding him because we have sought him diligently, we can worship him truly. The more we know him and experience him the more truly we worship him.

One of the greatest scenes of worship I've witnessed with my eyes was that in which the preacher dwelt a long time on preaching on the majesty and greatness of God. After his sermon people were asked to worship, it was an outburst of worship that had all the marks and traces of sincerity and pure admiration. Not the boisterous, noisy, or hypocritical type. Why? They had spent a long time in gazing on his majesty through the preaching of his word. The clearer our vision of home the purer our worship.

It is written, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke." (Isaiah 6:1 - 4). Talking about this vision of Isaiah, Dr. Selwyn Hughes wrote, "The lofty throne, the attending seraphs, and the word they utter all combine to spell out one message: worship is the highest function of any of God's created beings." If this all important function is to be well done, it must begin at beholding him that is seated upon the throne. We therefore must call to mind the importance of having a steadfast gaze upon God. Failure to do that would lead to the failure to execute the most important function of our being. That I say is a colossal failure.

The root meaning of the word worship would help us understand why this is of necessity so. Worship means the expression of the worthiness of God, acknowledgement of his worth, or simply worth-ship. How do you acknowledge one's worth or declare things of someone whom you've not seen? If I've never been to Nepal before and I just start declaring that Nepal is a garden city that has miracle rain once a year that is slightly blue in colour, and on and on, won't that be deception? Not only is that deception, it is foolishness. So it is when someone tries to worship without seeing him that is seated upon the throne. But when you have witnessed his manifest presence and have seen him who is seated upon the throne, the simple declaration of what you see of him who is seated upon the throne is true worship.

It is written in Psalms 89:7, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." From this we know that worship flows naturally from the heart of any true Christian that dwells in his presence. He says God is had in reverence of those that are ABOUT HIM. Not away from him. When you are away from him and don't know him you can't have him in reverence. The more you know him the deeper the reverence.

Having known what the threshold of worship is, it becomes easy for us to know most other thing that worship entails and what it does not. If worship begins by beholding him that is seated upon the throne, and one cannot be in sin and behold that holy face, a true worshiper is essentially holy and righteous. Those eyes which are like a flame of fire will frighten away any sinner. I am not a sinless person, and so do know how sin can be a barrier to true worship. Worship is to be done in holiness and purity. This is why the Psalmist says "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Psalm 66:18). To worship God is to express your love, affection and reverence for him. Worship of God is not you expressing your adoration for him to me. Though I may hear you worshiping God in a public worship, declaring your admiration of him to me is not the essence of your worship. A worship that must be true must be a worship that is declared to God. If he doesn't hear it then it is not worship indeed. If the Bible then says that regarding iniquity in our hearts would prevent God from hearing us, then we know that a true worshiper must be holy as he is holy. This doesn't mean we must be angels before we can worship God, but it means all sins be confessed and repented of, then will our worship be heard of him.

The psalmist also wrote, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2). Worship must be done in "the beauty of holiness." This term, "the beauty of holiness," was what was used to characterise the worship worthy of God. For holiness is beautiful to the eyes that is not clouded by sin. We must worship God in the beauty of holiness, not in the cloud and distortion of sin. Such a sight unclouded by sin is that which can see the beauty of God's holiness and praise it.

Sin dulls worship. If worship begins by beholding him who sits on the throne, then we ought to know that sins beclouds the vision of our heavenward gaze. If we must truly worship God in truth and in spirit and feel the exultant joy of beholding his majesty, then we must maintain a life of consistent holiness. I tell you most confidently that the pleasure of worshipping God in the beauty of holiness is far sweeter than all the pleasures of sin. That is why it is written, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16:11). There's nothing better than to behold the living God seated upon his throne and enjoying his presence, and looking back at yourself to see that your life is pleasing to his heavenly majesty. Nothing. The worship therefore which is devoid of holiness would of necessity be devoid of joy and exultancy. It will be dull and mechanical. The pretended joy and phoney acts of admiration we see prevalent today is not what true worship entails.

For these reasons, many are vain worshipers for they worship God in disobedience. That is why it is written in Ezekiel 33:31, "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love,

but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Today women dress like Jezebel, refuse to cover their heads, and lead the church in worship in disobedience to scriptural commands. Some men wear skullcaps and worship. Your gospel artistes dress and sing like they were groomed in Babel. These are the outward acts of disobedience that we can observe, but how many there are who inwardly are defiled and have unconfessed sins. All these worship God in vain. To such kind of people God says, "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." (Amos 5:23). And, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9).

True worship cannot be separated from obedience to God, for to honour God with mere words and not obey him is to contradict oneself and declare that God is unfit to be obeyed. Agreeing with this Bishop Aurelius Augustine of Hippo wrote, "God is worshipped chiefly by faith, hope, and charity." The things by which we don't suppose we worship God with are those by which we sometimes worship him the most. By faith in God we acknowledge and declare that he is and that he is true, by hope we declare that he is trustworthy, by charity we declare that he's worthy to be obeyed. How shall the man then that has declared him to be unworthy of obedience say he is worshiping God? Every act of worship from the disobedient is an act of cruel mockery.

A.W. Tozer also said, "Worship is as pure or as base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God." The mind cannot by the loftiest poetry and keenest reason conceive the loftiness of God. To truly have a high a lofty thought that can inspire true worship, the worship needs to ascend into the holy hill of the Holy One.

Again Dr. Selwyn Hughes wrote in his devotional Everyday With Jesus in an issue themed "The Vision Of God," he said, “When we lose our sense of God’s transcendence then a hundred different ills arise within us… with the loss of the sense of God’s transcendence comes the further loss of understanding the significance of worship. To truly worship God we need to see that we are worshipping Someone who is not only above us, but far above us… To think that God is transcendent inspires adoration and worship…” If you despise God, it will be obvious in your worship and life. But if God be honoured, your worship of him shall be pure and true.

Worship is to be in spirit and in truth. This means that worship is not a thing of verbal exercise or watery eyes. When you sing and cry and shed the tears that can fill a bucket, o then it is assumed one has worshiped God. True, one may in the worship of God shed tears, but I think tears come out of my eyes when chopping onions too, so it is not about tears at all. It is not merely about singing or any other verbal exercise. Worship, says Jesus, is to be done in spirit and in truth. You worship in your spirit. It is with that eye of the spirit you behold him who is seated on the throne. You can't see God with these eyes with which you were born. But with the eye of the spirit being unclouded by sin and every distraction you can behold him steadfastly. Beholding him and expressing what you see in the truth is all about worship. When a spiritual man says "O God, you are holy." He is not saying what he was told by a scholar, he is saying what he has beheld. The endless worshipers before his throne can't stop because they are in his presence. They just keep affirming what they behold in him who is seated on the throne not that they just like saying something. This is worship. A thing of the spirit. A thing of the inward man. You mustn't

speak for others to hear, and you mustn't do some acrobatics for others to see, yet the heart is burning within in fervent worship. When beholding him that is seated on the throne it sometimes results into speechlessness. You can't express what you feel about him that is seated on the throne. You can be so overwhelmed with this aura that you just fall on your knees and acclaim his qualities which you have beheld. This is worship. But it must start within.

Thomas Aquinas wrote in his "Summa Theologica," “For since man is composed of soul and body, each of these should be applied to the worship of God; the soul by an interior worship; the body by an outward worship.” The whole man ought to be involved in worship just as the whole man is involved in salvation as it is written, "For with the heart [inward man] man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth [outward man] confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:10). And so we start in the spirit as Christ says, "they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). So, since he's a Spirit, we must behold him in the spirit to truly worship him. And from a heart full of adoration the mouth ought to declare the praise of him who sits on the throne as the psalmist says, "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations." (Psalm 89:1). And again, "Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day." (Psalm 71:8).

Not only is it our heart, mind, and body that should be used in the worship of God, our very life too ought to declare his praise. We have talked about holiness, but even the way we engage in things that can be considered un-religious is to express his worship. The way we go about our secular duties, relate with others, friends we keep, songs we listen to, our choice of dress

and so on. The whole being must be used in the worship of God.

Just as when the thick black cloud of sin beclouds our vision, we can't have genuine worship, so also when the fair clouds of worry, anxiety, doubt, and other things cloud our vision, our worship would not be pure, yet worshipping God can clear such clouds, for indeed when our eyes are fixed on him whose seated on the throne and worship, it places everything in their right perspective and these things begin to disappear. One would say worry, anxiety, doubts, etc. aren't sinful, but they do have a damaging effect on our worship.

So true worship is another evidence of the manifest presence of God. Not vain worship. And true worship is also a measure of our Christian maturity. True worship is in fact one mark by which we identify as Christians as it is written, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:2 - 3). Thomas Aquinas wrote, “if a man fear and worship God, this shows that he has a right judgment about Divine things.” To render true worship to God reflects the fact that our vision is unclouded by sin and earth born clouds of worry and all. It shows we have a right understanding pertaining to God.

So as we walk with God, let's be careful to examine how well we worship God for herein shall we feel the pulse of our spirits. The man who worships God aright is a man who resides in God's manifest presence. May God help us to reside in his presence, behold his wondrous majesty and being inspired by the excellency of his glory begin to worship him in truth and in spirit. Amen.

Prayer: Dear Father of our being, teach us to examine our worship life and to trace those marks of true worship. Where we are found wanting help us to make amends and draw closer to you in sweet fellowship. And as we draw closer to you may our lives abound with heartfelt and true worship of you. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 40: RENDITION OF LOVING SERVICES TO GOD

"If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour."
(John 12:26)

We move on now to the loving service to God. When we dwell in the manifest presence of God another natural result is that we render loving services to God. Here I do not just speak about anything that has a similitude to service, but I refer to true service founded on love. If it is loving then it of necessity has to be selfless.

A man paying his son's school fees and taking care of him is a form of loving service. Does he do these things because of what he would get from his son? No, for though a child can grow to recompense his parents, it is love that moves them to give the best to their children. Loving service does not entail seeking for benefits. It is something we do sacrificially on account of love. The moment that benefit is included in the object of our service to God, it is no more a loving service. It is now a transaction. You rendering service to get something in return.

The very presence of God inspires us to serve. The moment Christ steps into your life as Lord, the soul recognises him as

such. And it is only natural to seek to do the service of ones Lord. When Paul witnessed the manifest presence of Christ and had a brief conversation with him, it is written, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). "What wilt thou have me to do?" is the natural question we have when we have been in his manifest presence. And again it is written concerning Joshua, "And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?" (Joshua 5:13 - 14). The natural response was, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" Inquiry as to what the Lord desires him to do is the natural response of stepping into the presence of the Lord.

God draws us to himself and when by his grace we have heard his call and responded to his call, we of necessity know that he that has called us called us for a purpose. And when we come into his presence, reason advises us to wonder and so request what is the purpose of his calling us. When Cornelius called for apostle Peter, when he finally came into his presence, he said, "... I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" (Acts 10:29). So the natural course of salvation and our walk with God inspires us to both seek what ways to render unto him loving services and having found them (for they are many) to go ahead to render those services.

The call of Jesus is always clear, "And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you..." (Matthew 4:19). And we can

see all through Jesus' ministry how he said to people, "follow me." And that call has he extended to you and I hope you have heard his call and are following him. When he calls you to himself it is for a purpose and the true lover of Christ would be eager to know what that purpose is and to do them for his name's sake and in his name.

We can't be like him and not do his work. Though God, when he stepped into our world and took our flesh, Jesus was committed to doing the works of the Father with every moment of his life. So we too, to be like him, as long as we breathe must be in the service of God. And since he's God, service to him also comprises holiness.

Today however we don't see this loving service in those who claim to be on a "full time" ministry for Christ. They follow Christ for gain. They render him service with the interest of making money. They in their foolishness look to transact with God. They are exactly like those referred to in Ezekiel 33:31 which says, "... for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." There is no definition that fits the preachers of today other than this, "commercial preachers." Preachers who preach for money. This is not a loving service, it is a commercial service. A covetous one at that. Another evidence that shows that the preachers of today are distant from God and are merely charlatans trying to make money from exploiting gullible people whose trust they've betrayed.

You, on your part, examine yourself. Does your fellowship with God lead you to wish to do all you can for Jesus' sake and in Jesus' name? At the moment what are you doing for his dear name's sake. This too is an evidence of the manifest presence of

God. You don't need to do things he hasn't led you to just because you want to do things in his name and for his name's sake. But the eagerness to serve him with a loving service is another evidence of the fact that you have been with him and are residing with him.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Master who has called all mankind to yourself. As it is obvious that when you called us you did so for a reason. Help us to find that reason in your presence and commence from henceforth a life of loving service to you in your name and for your name's sake. This I ask this day in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 41: PEACE WITH ALL MEN

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."
(Luke 6:45)

We've spoken about peace before but we need to look at having peace with all men as an evidence of the manifest presence of God. We had said, "We must consciously make the effort to be at peace with all men, both believing and unbelieving, else we shall wreck our walk with God." That means that peace with men is essential and a prerequisite to a successful work with God. But now we need to look at it as a natural result of walking with him.

It is written, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." (Luke 6:45). A good man that is at peace with his God, the lover of his soul, and dwells with him in a sweet and pure bliss is full of peace. Out of the abundance of that peace he lives at peace with all men. He has nothing to offer to others but peace. So living in peace with all men is a natural result of walking with God.

On the other hand, men that are hostile to all are they who live

far from God. The moment Adam sinned and left the presence of God his responses to God became hostile. When God asked him how he knew he was naked, his hostile response was to shift the blame on God for giving him Eve. When Cain sinned his response to God's questions was a hostile retort, "am I my brother's keeper?" When Saul sinned, his life was full of hostility. He pursued David to every hole. He killed the priests of his time except the one that escaped. His whole life was an embodiment of hostility. And when you read of all the kings of Israel and Judah, the moment they sinned they began to be hostile to all. Even the righteous Asa whom God had lifted up on high. When he sought help from Ethiopia rather than from God who had helped him in the past, God was angry with him and sent his prophet to rebuke the king for his foolishness. The natural response of a man whose relationship with God has been broken was the response that Asa gave. It is written, "Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time." (2 Chronicles 16:10). So not only did he become hostile to the prophet who brought the word to him, he became hostile to others as well and oppressed them. And it was later written of him, "And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians." (2 Chronicles 16:12). His relationship with God was so broken that in his disease he simply refused to seek God for healing. He was hostile to even God too and kept malice against him.

So, it is manifest that he that walks with his Maker lives in peace with all men. And whatever appears to be that he isn't walking in peace with any person, you can be sure that the hostility is not his making. It was ever the doctrine of Selwyn

Hughes that when God is the centre of any life that life becomes orderly, but when God is out of centre the life becomes disorderly. How true. When we walk with God thus making him the centre of our lives, then our lives including our relationship with men will be orderly and wholesome, but the sinner who lives in his sin and won't repent, thus casting God out of the centre of his life, would have disorderly discordant relationship with all.

We had said, "... the way we relate with others has a way of leaking into the way we relate with God." And it is also vice versa. The way we relate with God has a way of leaking into the way we relate with others. So as this is an indicator in our walk with God, we need to examine ourselves under this light and see how well we are doing. Are you at peace with your God? To what extent are you at peace with men about you? Yes sometimes even when you're peaceful, men can be at war with you, but on your part, are you at peace with men? Are you inwardly resentful towards others? Or are you favourably disposed towards others?

Sincerely give an answer to these questions and you shall be able to feel the pulse of the health of your walk with God. On a final note, "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." (James 3:18). Righteousness in the heart breeds peace.

Prayer: Oh Lord God of Peace, how shall I dwell in your presence without experiencing peace, having peace, and giving peace? Help me that where my life is not in harmony with others to trace where the fault is. If it is because my inward peace has been devastated by sin, help me to be reconciled with you in repentance and contrition and so make peace with

you and myself. May your peace flood my being and be manifest in my relationship with others. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHAPTER 42: AWE AND SILENCE

"But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."
(Habakkuk 2:20)

"Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation."
(Zechariah 2:13)

When we said earlier that all that experience the presence of God fell down as dead and that his presence instils in us reverence, fear, and terror, all these have a combined effect of silence. When we stand in God's awful majesty, it has the effect of rendering us speechless. This is an awe inspired speechlessness. When they fell down as dead, they couldn't speak until they were touched and strengthened.

Furthermore, in the presence of one for whom we have deep reverence, fear, and dread, we have no choice but to be silent, for talking in the presence of anyone of high regard, except when given permission to speak, whether expressed or implied, is an act of insolence. The voice is used either to teach, instruct, or to air opinions. These things may not be direct and formal as if one were to say, "thank you for inviting me to lecture in this class," or "my reason for being here is to air my opinion," and proceed to teach, lecture, or air one's opinions. But in the course of casual talk we either teach, instruct, or air opinions even

when we seem to be merely asking questions. So he that must speak must be he that has something and someone to teach or must be someone whose opinion is relevant. So he that speaks in the presence of one higher than he disrespects the higher one in whose presence he stands. So who is he that wishes to speak in the presence of God? It is written, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:34). In the presence of God, reverence demands that we remain silent.

The wise king admonishes, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." (Ecclesiastes 5:1 - 2). So let your words be few when the Lord of all is present. For this reason the prophet Habakkuk commands, "the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." (Habakkuk 2:20). And prophet Zephaniah also says in Zephaniah 1:7, "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests." We have ample instructions to be silent in the presence of God.

Back to the story of Job, as we had seen, before his experience of God, he was strong and tall in his righteousness. Nothing of all that his friend could tell him dissuaded him from his boast. He spoke so much of confronting God to plead his cause. He had said, "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked." (Job

10:2 - 3). He went on and on in his speech. But when God finally appeared to him, he saw the glory of God. Even though God encouraged him to speak his response was, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." (Job 40:4 - 5). So the majestic aura of his presence and the reverence it inspires in turn inspires silence, that full reluctance to speak.

This does not mean that the presence of God has the effect of keeping us quiet the entire time we spend observing our quiet time. It doesn't mean that the presence of God in our churches has the effect of making our services to be held in total silence from beginning to the end and each one starts leaving when fed up with the silence. Rather it means that his presence has the effect of making our words to be few and each word we utter to be for a definite, defined, reverent, and edifying purpose, all according to the word of God. When we speak in the church of God for the edification of the church, we have been given the licence to speak so in (1 Corinthians 14:26). Our words both in our quiet time, family devotion, and church service, if we have God's presence residing with us, would mean our words would not be loose but be guided and restrained.

Herein is one of the marks that God dwells and resides with us. Where people talk, sing, and behave misguidedly, the presence of God is not manifest.

Prayer: Dear Lord in whose presence man ought to be quiet, help us to experience your presence in awe and silence. Where we find in our private or public worship that we speak misguidedly, help us to examine our lives and have a change from deep within that will enable us experience that awe

inspired silence, that all our ways may be guided and orderly, to the glory of your matchless name. Amen.

SECTIONAL HYMN

SEARCH ME, O GOD

By Orr, J. Edwin (James Edwin), 1912-1987

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from ev'ry sin and set me free.

praise thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;
Fulfill thy Word, and make me pure within.
Fill me with fire where once I burned with shame;
Grant my desire to magnify thy name.

Lord, take my life and make it wholly thine;
Fill my poor heart with thy great love divine.
Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride;
I now surrender; Lord, in me abide.

SECTION 7:

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 43: CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."
(Revelation 22:17)

We have come to the end of this book and so it is good to have a recap of all we've gone through. We had talked about approaching God, walking with him, what to do when we find ourselves erring, and finally the evidences in ourselves when we walk with him.

When we looked at the work of Richard of Saint Victor, we had seen the attributes recommended to us by the great man, using the family of Jacob to explain them to us. To ensure we have a good walk with God, we must let the works of the free women work freely in us which are, love for God and reason. And we must ensure we keep captive the work of the servants and never let them work in us. These works are sensuality and the imagination. Our success in our walk with God depends hugely on to what extent we encourage the works of the free women and to what extent we keep under the works of the servant women. Doing this will give birth to all virtues required for our walk with God. Though the words of this book are not written in the same words or order, yet if we follow his simple and

brief advice of letting the free women work freely in our lives and keep the works of the servants in constant check, all that we have discussed in this book will be easily achieved.

Let us love God and walk with him. He wants to be reconciled with you. The blessings of walking with him are immense. All who have walked with him can tell how blessed it is to walk with God.

On this note I bring this book to an end. Let's sing our introductory hymn by Charles Wesley:

"Away with our fears,
Our troubles and tears.
The Spirit is come,
The witness of Jesus
Returned to His home;

The pledge of our Lord
To His Heaven restored
Is sent from the sky,
And tells us our Head
Is exalted on high.

Our Advocate there
By His blood and His prayer
The gift hath obtained,
For us He hath prayed,
And the Comforter gained;

Our glorified Head
His Spirit hath shed
With His people to stay

And never again
Will He take Him away.

Our heavenly Guide
With us shall abide,
His comforts impart,
And set up His kingdom
Of love in the heart.

The heart that believes
His kingdom receives
His power and His peace,
His life, and His joy's
Everlasting increase.

The presence divine
Doth inwardly shine,
The Shechinah shall rest
On all our assemblies,
And glow in our breast;

By day, and by night
The pillar of light
Our steps shall attend,
And convoy us safe
To our prosperous end.

Then let us rejoice
In heart and in voice
Our Leader pursue,
And shout as we travel
The wilderness through;

With the Spirit remove
To Zion above,
Triumphant arise,
And walk with our God,
Till we fly to the skies."

---Charles Wesley (1707-1788)---

Prayer: Dear Lord and God. Thank you for bringing me to the end of this book. I am most grateful for the grace to go through it all. I pray that you shall give me the grace to remain steadfastly in your presence, bear all the marks and evidences of it and have the blessed end of living with you for all eternity. This I ask in Jesus' matchless name. Amen.

THE END

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